

Written Answers.

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

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

Official Engagements

10. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to the United Kingdom on 19 May 2017. [25365/17]

11. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his conversation with the British Prime Minister, Ms Theresa May, on 24 May 2017.. [25569/17]

12. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his telephone conversation with Prime Minister May following the horrendous bomb attack in the Manchester Arena. [25626/17]

14. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the contact he has had with the United Kingdom regarding the terrorist attack in Manchester on 22 May 2017. [25680/17]

15. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with Prince Charles on 12 May 2017. [25681/17]

16. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to London on 19 May 2017. [25622/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 10 to 12, inclusive, and 14 to 16, inclusive, together.

Former Taoiseach Kenny met with Prince Charles in Government Buildings on 12 May as part of the three day visit by the Prince and his wife Camilla the Duchess of Cornwall to Ireland.

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

My predecessor travelled to London on 19 May for a number of engagements including an address to the Ireland Funds Great Britain London City Lunch. He also attended a Global Irish Network Breakfast event in the Embassy and visited the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith where he met a number of Enterprise Ireland clients.

He spoke by phone with Prime Minister May on 24 May following the terrorist attack in Manchester, and again on 11 June regarding the NI talks process and the proposed supply and confidence arrangement between her party and the DUP.

Question No. 13 resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 17 to 55, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 56 to 64, inclusive, answered orally.

Creative Ireland Programme

65. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the future investment which is planned for the National Opera House, County Wexford in line with the creative Ireland programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27609/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The National Opera House in Wexford was constructed in 2008 – 2010 with funding of €31 million from my Department. My Department is engaging with the Office of Public Works and the National Opera House in terms of the ongoing capital needs to protect this public investment. The Office of Public Work had a key role in designing and managing the construction of the Opera House and has the necessary expertise in this area. My Department will, in turn, consider any requests for capital funding in the context of the advice provided by the OPW and in light of the resources available to the Department and the demands on those resources. The National Opera House is a wonderful venue and is the home of Wexford Festival Opera which is one of the most successful festivals in the world. Recently Wexford Festival Opera won the highly coveted Best Festival category at the International Opera Awards in London ahead of other shortlisted leading international opera festivals in the UK, France, Italy and the United States.

We can all be proud of the achievements and excellence of the annual Wexford Opera Festival. The state-of-the-art Opera House allows the Festival to attract national and international audiences to experience the experience the Opera at the highest levels and is an inspiration for what this Government is seeking to achieve through the *Creative Ireland Programme* nationwide.

Action Plan for Rural Development

66. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of the implementation of the action plan for rural development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27547/17]

Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Michael Ring): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development was launched in January of this year. The Plan contains 276 actions for delivery across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other organisations to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland. Every action has a defined timeline for completion and the organisations responsible for implementing each action are clearly identified.

The Government has committed to publishing progress reports on the implementation of the Action Plan every 6 months, with the first report due to be published in July. However, significant progress has already been made in implementing the Plan and for this reason, I decided last month to publish an interim Progress Report setting out the headline achievements made to date across Government under the Plan. Some examples of initiatives under my own Department's

remit include:

- the launch of the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme with funding of €20 million over 12-15 months to support the economic development of up to 300 towns and villages;
- the launch of 2017 CLÁR and Rural Recreation Infrastructure programmes, with combined funding of €16 million; and
- the investment of €9 million in 62 arts and culture centres across the country, with over 80% of this investment in rural areas.

Details of these and other actions across Government are available in the interim Progress Report on the Action Plan for Rural Development which is available on a dedicated website, www.ruralireland.ie, which is administered by my Department.

I am determined that the Action Plan for Rural Development will be implemented in full over its three-year lifespan and that it will make a real difference to the people who live and work in rural Ireland. I have put in place a comprehensive structure to ensure that all of the actions are robustly monitored, and a high level Monitoring Committee, which I chair, has been established to oversee the process.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

67. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way in which the 2017 town and village renewal scheme will differ to the 2016 scheme; when she expects to announce successful applicants under the 2017 scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27572/17]

Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched 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 12 months.

This year's initiative builds on the 2016 scheme, including feedback from stakeholders, and a number of changes have been introduced to strengthen its impact.

The categories of eligible towns will remain unchanged, with a focus on towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000. However, the selection of projects will be by means of a national competitive process. Local Authorities have been instructed to advertise for expressions of interest from towns and villages who wish to be considered for funding.

Applications are particularly encouraged from projects which have clear positive economic impacts on a town or village, or which stimulate economic activity between a town and its neighbouring townlands. Projects which demonstrate leveraging of, or linkages with, complementary schemes operated by other Departments or agencies in areas such as tourism, heritage or business supports will also be favourably considered.

Timeframes in which to prepare applications have been extended, but projects must be in a position to commence during 2017 and be completed by mid-2018. Funding will issue in two tranches: 50% of the total allocation will be paid when a minimum of 20% of the total project cost has been expended, and the remainder will be paid on satisfactory completion of the project.

Funding is also available under the scheme for art works to enhance public spaces, as part

of one or more project proposals submitted by each Local Authority.

The objective of these, and other changes which have been introduced this year, is to achieve greater impact from the investment in the Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The closing date for receipt of applications through the Local Authorities is 30th June. The assessment of applications will commence immediately after this date, with the objective of announcing the successful applicants by the end of July.

Creative Ireland Programme

68. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way in which she plans to promote the Norman Way under the creative Ireland programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27610/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme 2017–2022* in December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/ É ire Ildánach, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016. This is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. It focuses on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme. Further information on the programme, its key pillars and deliverables for 2017 is available online at <https://creative.ireland.ie>.

Pillar Two of the Programme – *Enabling creativity in every community* – is being implemented primarily through the local authorities who, as the primary instruments of community engagement, have a particular capacity for engaging citizens through local programme delivery including heritage initiatives and promotion.

A dedicated budget of €1m from the overall Creative Ireland Programme budget of €5m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two including the publication of a Culture and Creativity Plan for each county. These plans were launched by the Taoiseach on the 25 May 2017 and are available online at <https://creative.ireland.ie/en/local-plans>.

Each plan includes a series of projects that will utilise the funding I have provided as well as a list of promotional events occurring in each county throughout the year.

It was a matter for the local authority to decide on what events/projects to fund and consider for inclusion in their Culture and Creativity Plans and I note that Wexford County Council included raising awareness about the Norman Way as one of the projects/ initiatives to be delivered in County Wexford in 2017 under the Creative Ireland Programme.

CLÁR Programme

69. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the 2017 CLÁR programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27575/17]

Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31st March 2017 and will provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects

in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. Funding is available this year under four separate Measures:

Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure

Measure 4: First Responder Supports

Applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3 were submitted through the Local Authorities, while Measure 4 was targeted at voluntary organisations involved in emergency rescue or first-response efforts. The closing date for applications under the 2017 CLÁR programme was 5th May 2017 and over 500 applications were received across the four measures.

Successful projects were announced over the last few weeks, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects across the four Measures. Details of the approved projects are available on the Rural Affairs pages of the website www.ahrrga.gov.ie. Payments will, in general, be made to the successful applicants on a phased basis when the projects have commenced and have made a satisfactory level of progress.

The CLÁR programme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, and makes a huge contribution to supporting the most depopulated areas in rural Ireland. Over 800 projects have now been approved for funding since the scheme was re-launched last year.

Commemorative Events

70. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the Decade of Centenaries commemorative events she has attended since 26 March 2016; and the commemorative events she hopes to attend during the remainder of 2017. [22974/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I have attended a large number of commemorative events since Easter Saturday, 26th March 2016, as part of the Decade of Centenaries commemorative programme.

The 1916 centenary commemorations were inclusive, respectful and measured and sought to strengthen peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. Never in the history of our State have so many of our citizens been involved in shared historical and cultural events that honoured the courage, dignity, and ideals of the events and personalities of that tumultuous time in our history. A million people came out on to the streets of Dublin over the Easter weekend in 2016 – in an extraordinary celebration and commemoration, the like of which we may never see again in our lifetimes.

Last year we also commemorated the Battle of the Somme. I travelled to the site of the Battle of the Somme at Thiepval in Northern France on July 1st to participate in the commemoration, which was jointly hosted by the French and British Governments. I returned to France in September, to remember the fateful events which took place in Guillemont 100 years previously.

This year I also attended official State ceremonies to commemorations to mark the Easter Rising and just last week, I attended commemorations of the Battle of Messines Ridge at the

Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines, which were jointly led by the Governments of Ireland and the UK, in partnership with the Mayor of Messines.

Commemorating these events has deepened our understanding of the context of that time – an understanding which is respectful of alternative perspectives and which has contributed towards a society that is more knowledgeable of its complex history.

The full list of State Ceremonial events which I attended since 26th March 2016, is set out in the table to this reply which will be published in the official report. In addition to these formal State ceremonial events, I attended a range of cultural, educational, historical and ceremonial events which were supported by the State, or led at local authority or community level.

As Minister with responsibility for Commemorations I will continue to attend many events over the coming period, including for example, the State Ceremonial event to honour poet Francis Ledwidge in Slane on the 24th of June. In terms of the overall approach to the Decade of Centenaries, the Government will be continued to be guided by the advice of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations in this regard.

Date	State and Ceremonial Commemorative Event
26/03/2016	State Commemoration in the Garden of Remembrance for those who died during the 1916 Rising.State Ceremonial Event in the RDS for the relatives of those who fought during the 1916 rising.
27/03/2016	State Commemoration in Glasnevin Cemetery, including wreath-laying ceremonies at the Sigerson Monument and graves of Edward Hollywood and Peadar Kearney.Easter Sunday State Commemoration and Parade at the GPO.
28/03/2016	Wreath-laying ceremony at Moore Street, which was one of a number of synchronised wreath-laying ceremonies on Easter Monday in Dublin and various regional locations.
03/04/2016	Interfaith Service at Glasnevin Cemetery.
10/04/2016	Rising to Reconciliation Ceremonial Event at the Abbey Theatre.
24/04/2016	State Commemoration at Arbour Hill
26/05/2016	State Ceremonial Event in Grangegorman Cemetery to remember the British Soldiers who died during the 1916 Rising.
01/07/2016	Commemoration of the Battle of the Somme at the Thiepval Monument in France, jointly hosted by the French and British Governments.
09/07/2016	State Commemoration of the Battle of the Somme at the Irish National War Memorial Park, Islandbridge
03/09/2016	Wreath-laying ceremony at the location of the original Ginchy Cross at Guillemont, France.
13/11/2016	Inauguration in Glasnevin Cemetery of the Ireland France Memorial, which commemorates the contribution of Irishmen to the defence and freedom of France.
16/04/2017	State Commemoration in Glasnevin Cemetery, including wreath-laying ceremonies at the Sigerson Monument and graves of Edward Hollywood and Peadar Kearney.Easter Sunday State Commemoration and Parade at the GPO.
03/05/2017	State Commemoration at Arbour Hill.

Date	State and Ceremonial Commemorative Event
09/06/2017	State commemoration at Wyttschaete Cemetery. Joint Irish and British Commemoration of the Battle of Messines, Island of Ireland Peace Park, Messines. State commemoration at the graveside of Major Willie Redmond.

Leader Programmes

71. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the value of projects approved fully to date in 2017 under the Leader programme 2014 to 2020 in County Donegal; the expenditure by her Department on projects to date in 2017 in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27607/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Funding Agreements with Local Action Groups (LAGs) for the delivery of the 2014-2020 LEADER programme were signed in the second half of 2016. Since then, the LAGs have been working to establish their programmes locally and encourage applications.

I am advised that the Local Action Group in Donegal has not yet approved any projects under the LEADER programme. However, I understand that more than 300 expressions of interest from potential applicants, with an estimated value of over €12 million, have been recorded in respect of Donegal on the LEADER ICT system. The LAG is currently working through these expressions of interest with a view to assisting project promoters to develop and finalise their project applications.

In light of concerns regarding the pace of approval of projects under the LEADER programme, I hosted a forum on 17th May last with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, including those from Donegal. The forum provided a platform to explore the administrative issues impacting on project approvals, and to identify potential solutions to the issues identified.

The forum was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined. My officials reviewed all of the contributions made at the forum and identified a significant number of administrative changes that can be made to simplify and improve the delivery of the LEADER Programme. I have written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies to update them on the measures that will be taken in the immediate future to improve the processes.

In light of the level of expressions of interest received in Donegal, and the administrative changes being introduced, I anticipate a significant increase in LEADER project approvals in Donegal over the coming months.

Cruinnithe an Aire

72. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnaíochta, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil sé ar intinn aici bualadh le haon eagraíocht Ghaeilge nó Ghaeltachta sa toadhchá. [27585/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Toisc go mbeidh na freagrachtaí reachtúla maidir leis an teanga tarmhligthe domsa mar Aire Stáit do Ghnóthaí Gaeltachta, is ormsa go príomha a thitfidh an cúram casadh le hea-

grais Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta, de réir mar is gá. Sa chomhthéacs sin, pléifear le haon cuirí a thagann faoi mo bhráid de réir mar a fhaighfear iad.

Ní mór dom a chur in iúl don Teachta go raibh caidreamh an-mhaith agam leis na heagrais Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta le linn mo théarma dheiridh mar Aire Stáit na Gaeltachta agus go bhfuil sé mar sprioc agam tógáil ar an gcaidreamh sin sa tréimhse atá amach romhainn.

National Museum

73. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on whether the new master plan issued by the National Museum of Ireland will meet her objectives for the institution. [27584/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Museum of Ireland is a valuable part of the cultural heritage of the State. Under the new Board which I appointed last year, the Museum is now planning for the future in a strategic fashion and is in the process of finalising a master plan to provide for its future development. The plan has not yet issued but I do look forward to engaging with the Museum over the coming period before it is finalised. The master plan for the Museum will also to be considered in the wider policy context of Government policy on the arts area including the *Creative Ireland Programme*. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is the Government's Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 – a five year initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy. The Government recognises that high quality infrastructure is critical for a vibrant arts and culture sector and that investment in cultural infrastructure underpins social cohesion and supports strong and sustainable economic growth. In line with this my Department is supporting the National Cultural Institutions in preparing ambitious but realistic investment plans, building on the progress already underway, to address infrastructure deficiencies in a planned and measured way. In particular, my Department is working on the development of an overall capital strategy for the cultural and heritage sector.

The Museum's plan, when finalised, will provide a valuable long-term roadmap for the development of this valuable cultural institution as part of this overall capital strategy.

Legislative Programme

74. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will consider delaying the passage of the current Heritage Bill and commission a study of the impact of recent wild fires on wildlife in affected areas to ascertain the damage such burning will do to wildlife. [27568/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976, as amended, prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or destruction of vegetation, with certain strict exemptions, from 1 March to 31 August.

Following a review of Section 40, which involved, inter alia, consideration of submissions from interested parties, I announced proposals in December 2015 to introduce legislation to allow for managed hedge cutting and burning at certain times within the existing closed period on a pilot two year basis. The legislation required to allow for these pilot measures is included in the Heritage Bill 2016, which was published in January 2016.

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

While my Department will assess the damage done by recent gorse fires, I do not believe that these incidents are related to the provisions in the Heritage Bill relating to burning and hedge cutting. This matter can of course be raised in the context of discussions on the Bill in Dáil Éireann.

Rural Recreation Promotion

75. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the 2017 rural recreation programme; her views on the potential to develop new tourism amenities such as a location (details supplied) in County Kildare through this programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27573/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme was launched on 28th April 2017 as part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development. The scheme will provide funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. Building on the 2016 Rural Recreation Scheme, the 2017 scheme has been enhanced and will provide funding of €11 million over a period of 15 months under the following measures:

Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing

Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail Development

Measure 3: Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategy Trail Development

The closing date for receipt of applications under Measures 1 and 2 was 31st May 2017 and the closing date for Measure 3 applications was 16th June 2017.

Projects such as the amenity mentioned by the Deputy would be eligible for funding under Measure 3. However, no application has been received in respect of the amenity in question under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme on this occasion.

Nonetheless, I am aware that there are a number of towns and villages along the amenity that provide a range of services and facilities to visitors and I believe that continued development of the amenity will serve to support the economic development of the area as a whole.

Action Plan for Rural Development

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she expects to be in position to identify particular towns or regions in respect of which grant assistance will be offered especially those areas deemed to have suffered particularly during the economic downturn; if her Department will co-operate with the local authorities with a view to a co-ordinated redevelopment programme to enhance, upgrade and improve the commercial, social and economic attractiveness of such locations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27590/17]

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 last, provides a policy framework for a coordinated approach to rural development across Government.

The Plan 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.

A number of the measures come under the remit of the Rural Affairs Division based in my Department, and include the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, LEADER and CLÁR. All of these schemes seek to address the issues encountered by rural areas which have suffered during the economic downturn. The Town and Village Renewal Scheme, in particular, is aimed at improving the commercial, social and economic attractiveness of rural towns and villages. My Department is also developing a pilot initiative to increase residential occupancy in rural town and village centres. It is hoped that this pilot can be launched later this year.

The Local Authorities are closely involved in the delivery of all of the initiatives referred to. A key requirement of many of the schemes operated by my Department is that projects proposed for funding by the Local Authorities are identified in co-operation with relevant local stakeholders, with particular reference to the Local Economic and Community Plans of the Local Authorities. The LEADER programme has its own community-led local development structure which is based around Local Development Strategies.

My Department engages with the Local Authorities on an on-going basis and my officials are available at all times to provide guidance for Local Authorities with regard to applications and to assist with any queries arising.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

77. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the impact she expects the funding for the action plan for rural development will have in the 300 towns and villages earmarked for this scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27566/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13 th April last. The scheme will see €20 million being invested in rural towns and villages over the next 12 months as part of the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Up to 300 towns and villages will benefit under the scheme, which is targeted at towns and villages with populations of less than 10,000. At least 60% of the funding will be available for towns and villages with a population of less than 5,000 people.

The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme places a particular emphasis on supporting measures which will have a clear economic impact on rural towns and villages. Projects which demonstrate linkages with other initiatives in areas such as heritage, tourism, arts, culture, the re-use of vacant premises, or business improvement schemes to increase the overall impact on town and village rejuvenation are strongly encouraged. Applications are welcome from projects which stimulate economic activity between a town and its neighbouring townlands.

Grants will range from €20,000 to a maximum of €100,000. Funding of up to €200,000 will also be considered for a limited number of projects which can deliver exceptionally strong

economic benefit to a town and/or its outlying areas.

I anticipate that successful applications under the Scheme will demonstrate clear and measurable economic impacts on the towns and villages in which they are implemented. Investing in our towns and villages and strengthening their economic activity and tourism offering will help to retain existing employment and create new jobs. It will make rural Ireland a better place in which to live, work and visit.

The closing date for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme is 30th June and it is anticipated that the successful applicants will be announced before the end of July.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Prosecutions

78. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of prosecutions that have been achieved by An Garda Síochána or by the National Parks and Wildlife Service relating to other fires that were lit in 2016 and since 2012 in view of the fact that only one application was made for controlled burning in 2016. [27588/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since 2007, the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department has taken some eleven prosecution cases for breaches of Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts relating to illegal burning of vegetation. Fines were imposed in most cases with, in some cases, the defendants being ordered by the Court to pay legal costs and expenses.

My Department does not maintain records nor have information in relation to prosecutions taken by An Garda Síochána.

Action Plan for Rural Development

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the degree to which she has made contact with the various local authorities with a view to identifying projects to upgrade the facilities in various towns and villages with a view to enhancement of the locations both economically and visually; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27591/17]

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 last, 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. From my own Department's perspective, I launched the 2017 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 12 months. The scheme will be delivered through the Local Authorities.

All Local Authorities were invited to the launch of the scheme in Moate, Co. Westmeath in April. They were also invited to attend an information session with staff of my Department directly after the launch, where the scheme details were outlined and any questions relating to the operation of the scheme were addressed. Three further information sessions were held in Sligo, Tullamore and Thurles, and Local Authorities and other stakeholders were invited to attend.

The closing date for receipt of applications under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme is 30th June 2017. It is envisaged that the successful applicants will be announced before the end of July.

There is also ongoing contact between Local Authorities and my Department in relation to other rural schemes under my Department's remit, including CLÁR and the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure scheme. My officials are available at all times to provide guidance to Local Authorities with regard to applications and to assist with any queries arising.

Action Plan for Rural Development

80. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress that has been made on the initiative to encourage increased residential occupancy in town and village centres as outlined in the action plan for rural development, by county; when the initiative is expected to commence; the funding made available for the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27614/17]

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 12 months.

It is intended to separately launch a pilot scheme later 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 initiative are being developed in consultation with relevant Departments and full particulars will be announced when the pilot is launched. I expect to make initial funding of €2 million available for the scheme in 2017. Funding will not be allocated on a county basis under this initiative.

Departmental Correspondence

81. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has received correspondence from a group (details supplied) regarding the sale of Luggala Estate, County Wicklow, the adjoining lands of the estate and its future use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27514/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 2nd May 2017.

Commemorative Events

82. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and

Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to reconstitute a new all party decade of commemorations committee; the timeframe for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27286/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am committed to re-establishing the Oireachtas All Party Consultation Committee on Commemorations. I intend to put in place the practical arrangements to re-constitute the group very shortly. In the period leading up to the 1916 centenary commemorations, the All Party Consultation Committee on commemorations was instrumental in promoting an open, consensus-based and honest approach, which allowed all narratives to be heard and ensured that the State reflected appropriately on all of the major historical events as they unfolded. The work of the Committee complemented the work of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations which also advised the Government on the approach based on the authentic history of the period.

The Government will continue to mark significant events throughout the second half of the Decade of Centenaries. This includes the Easter Commemorations ceremonies to mark the Easter Rising and events to mark the progress of World War I. For example, two weeks ago I attended commemorations of the Battle of Messines Ridge at the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines, which were jointly led by the Governments of Ireland and the UK, in partnership with the Mayor of Messines. On the Sunday of that week, I was honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of the Irish Government at the War Memorial, Armagh, in memory of the men of the 16th Irish Division and the 36th Ulster Division who fought side by side in that Battle. Last weekend I attended a special ceremony to mark the centenary of the foundation of Leopardstown Park Hospital as a convalescent home and hospital for the treatment of soldiers, injured in World War I.

I believe that both the All Party Committee and the Expert Advisory Group have a significant contribution to make in relation to the second half of the Decade of Centenaries and I am looking forward to continued positive engagement and consultation with both groups over the coming period.

Animal Welfare

83. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of times NPWS officials attended at hare coursing meetings in the 2016/2017 coursing season; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27349/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department monitored seventeen hare coursing meeting during the 2016/17 coursing season. It is intended that these reports along with the Irish Coursing Club reports which range over 70 coursing meetings will be published on the NPWS website over the coming weeks.

Réadmhaoin Údarás na Gaeltachta

84. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cá mhéad foirgneamh de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta atá folamh; cé chomh fada agus atá siad folamh; cén áit a bhfuil siad; cad iad na pleananna atá ag an Údarás maidir leo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [27611/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe

McHugh): Tá curtha in iúl ag Údarás na Gaeltachta go bhfuil 517 foirgneamh i seilbh na heagraíochta, 117 de chuid atá folamh i láthair na huaire. I gcomhréir leis na mBuanorduithe Seasta, cuirfear na sonraí maidir leis an staid reatha mar a bhaineann leis na bhfoirgnimh ar fad atá folamh faoi láthair díreach chuig an Teachta i bhfoirm tábla gan mhoill. Tá deimhnithe ag Údarás na Gaeltachta go bhfuil an eagraíocht ag cur críoch lena plean straitéiseach don tréimhse trí bliana amach romhainn i láthair na huaire. Beidh úsáid inmharthanach mhaoin an Údaráis lárnach sa straitéis seo agus leagfar amach clár oibre chun an mhaoin seo a uasghrádú agus a chur in oiriúint d'fhiontraíthe ar mhaithe le fostaíocht a chruthú.

Úsáidfear an mhaoin seo chun leanúint ar aghaidh le fiontraíthe áitiúla a spreagadh agus le hinfheisteoirí sheachtracha a mhealladh isteach sna ceantair Gaeltachta éagsúla le fostaíocht a chruthú thar réimsí earnálacha ábhartha. Beidh cuid den mhaoin seo á húsáid mar ionaid don ghréasán de Mhoil Digiteacha a bheidh á bhforbairt sna Gaeltachtaí éagsúla agus a fheidhmeoidh mar áiseanna d'fhiontar nuálaíoch chun réimse cianoibre an Údaráis a chur chun cinn.

Tábla

Léiríonn an tábla thíos an staid reatha mar a bhaineann leis na bhfoirgnimh ar fad atá folamh faoi láthair:

-		Dáta saor		Stádas An Mhí BaileGhib
Baile Ghib 1	Saor	01/01/2016	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				1 Aonad Ligean An Mhí
				Ciarraí
				PáircGhnónaCoille
Aonad 3	Saor	31/12/2004	Ceardlann	Réidh le ligean
				EastátBhaileanMhuilinn
Baile an Mhuilinn 1E	Saor	20/08/2015	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Baile an Mhuilinn 1F	Saor	28/02/2017	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Baile an Mhuilinn 1K	Saor	06/12/2014	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				SuíomhTionscailan-GlaiseBeag
Glaise Beag 1	Saor	07/02/2011	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				BaileanÉanaigh
Baile an Éanaigh 1	Saor	30/09/2015	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				ÁiseannanahOige
Áiseanna na hOige 1A	Saor	Nua	Ilnéithe	Réidh le ligean
				7 Aonad Ligean Ciarraí
				Corcaigh
				PáircGnóBhéa-lÁthaanGhaorthaidh
Aonad Gnó Béal Átha Ghaorthaidh	Saor	01/12/2013	Ceardlann	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				1 Aonad Ligean Corcaigh
				DúnnanGall
				EastátBun Beag
Bun Beag -- Teach 23T	Saor	04/07/2016	Teach	Athchóiriú ag teastáil

-		Dáta saor		Stádas An Mhí BailleGhib
Aonad Earagail 1C	Saor	09/01/2006	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Aonad Earagail 1N	Saor	01/01/2014	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Aonad Earagail 1R	Saor	27/07/2013	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Aonad Earagail 1V	Saor	06/04/2010	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Aonad Earagail 1K	Saor	23/11/2012	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Aonad Earagail 1D & G	Saor	27/01/2010	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Aonad Earagail 1J	Saor	26/05/2010	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Aonad Earagail 1E&F	Saor	10/07/2009	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Aonad Earagail 1M&P	Saor	09/08/2015	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 6B	Saor	30/06/2005	Ilgnéithe	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Bun Beag 7H	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7J	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7P	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7R	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7S	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7U	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7V	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Y1	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Y4	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Y5	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Z1	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Z2	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Z3	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 7Z6	Saor	Nua	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean

Questions - Written Answers

-		Dáta saor		Stádas An Mhí BailleGhib
Bun Beag 18B	Saor	Nua	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Bun Beag 21	Saor	01/05/2014	Oifig	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Bun Beag 27	Saor	08/12/2003	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Aonad E-Gnó 1	Saor	16/02/2015	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				EastátBhailenaMóna
Baile na Móna 1D	Saor	26/02/2010	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Baile na Móna 2	Saor	30/06/2008	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátanFháilCarraigh
An Fál Carrach 1	Saor	26/09/2016	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
An Fál Carrach 4	Saor	05/06/2007	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
An Fál Carrach 5	Saor	30/10/2010	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
An Fál Carrach 6	Saor	21/05/2001	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				EastátGhortanChoirce
Gort an Choirce 1	Saor	31/07/2011	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátChillChártha
Cill Chárthaigh 2D	Saor	Nua	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				EastátnaDúnaibh
Na Dúnaibh 1B	Saor	31/05/2016	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Na Dúnaibh 1C	Saor	31/05/2016	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Na Dúnaibh 1D	Saor	31/05/2016	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátAnagaire
Annagaire 1A	Saor	16/12/2011	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Annagaire 1B	Saor	08/03/2013	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátBhailenaFinne
Baile na Finne 2	Saor	27/05/2009	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Baile na Finne 4B	Saor	05/06/2006	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				TeachBhaileChonaill
Teach Baile Chonaill -Aonad	Saor	*	Ilgnéithe	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				MachaireRabhartaigh
Ionad Turasóireachta 1C	Saor	31/08/2010	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Ionad Turasóireachta 1D	Saor	31/07/2010	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Ionad Turasóireachta 1E	Saor	17/08/2010	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil

-		Dáta saor		Stádas An Mhí BailleGhib
Ionad Turasóireachta 1F	Saor	16/01/2011	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Ionad Turasóireachta 1G	Saor	24/04/2016	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				Fánaid2
Fánaid 2A- Spás Tairgáíocht	Saor	04/11/2005	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Fánaid 2B	Saor	02/06/2014	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				MarglannGhleann-Cholm Cille
Marglann Gleann Cholm Cille 1A	Saor	05/09/2008	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				Croithlí
Croithlí	Saor	31/12/2011	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				AnTearmainn
An Tearmainn 1	Saor	12/09/2005	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				55 Aonad Ligean Dún na nGall
				Gaillimh
				EastátBhaileantS-agairt
Teach an Mhainéara 8B-1ú urlár	Saor	02/03/2015	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Teach an Mhainéara 8C -1ú urlár	Saor	28/11/2014	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				EastátChasla
Casla 3F - Ionad Fiontraíochta	Saor	15/02/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Casla 3H - Ionad Fiontraíochta	Saor	28/02/2017	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Casla 4A	Saor	31/05/2008	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Casla 7B	Saor	28/08/2012	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Casla 8	Saor	22/01/2016	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				EastátRosanMhíl
Ros an Mhíl 2D	Saor	12/04/2014	Oifig	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				EastátnaCeathrúnRua
An Cheathrú Rua 1B	Saor	07/03/2005	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
An Cheathrú Rua 1C	Saor	07/03/2005	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
An Cheathrú Rua 5A	Saor	31/12/2009	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
An Cheathrú Rua 5C	Saor	31/12/2009	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
An Cheathrú Rua-iar foirg.dóit	Saor	14/05/2009	Ilgnéthe	Athchóiriú ag teastáil

Questions - Written Answers

-		Dáta saor		Stádas An Mhí BailleGhib
				EastátThíranFhia
Tír an Fhia 1C-suas staighre	Saor	12/03/2010	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Tír an Fhia 2	Saor	31/12/2002	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				EastátRosMuc
Ros Muc 1	Saor	30/04/2016	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Ros Muc 2	Saor	30/04/2016	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátCharna
Carna 2	Saor	16/10/2008	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				EastátChormnaMóna
Corr na Móna 2A	Saor	21/10/2013	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Corr na Móna 2B	Saor	28/07/2015	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				PáirenaMeán
Páirc na Méain 7	Saor	30/05/2014	Oifig	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				PáircGnónabhForbacha
Na Forbacha 1A	Saor	07/07/2008	Oifig	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Na Forbacha 1C	Saor	03/12/2013	Oifig	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Na Forbacha 1G	Saor	07/10/2011	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Na Forbacha 1H	Saor	01/04/2010	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				EastátBaileantSléibhe
Baile an tSléibhe 1C	Saor	22/10/2007	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				IonadFiontraíochta-RosMuc
Aonad 1A	Saor	15/06/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Aonad 1B	Saor	15/06/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Aonad 1C	Saor	15/06/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Aonad 1E	Saor	15/06/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Aonad 1F	Saor	15/06/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Aonad 1H	Saor	15/06/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
				Tithe na CeathrúnRua
Teach an Ghréasaí	Saor	25/10/2016	Ilgnéithe	Le díol
				TitheInisMór
Teach 2	Saor	27/01/2016	Teach	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				CoillSáile
Foirgneamh 1	Saor	01/01/2013	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				Ionad Fiontair InisMór
Sean Stáisiún	Saor	31/12/2004	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				36 Aonad Ligean Gaillimh

-		Dáta saor		Stádas An Mhí BailleGhib
				MaighEo
				EastátAitTíConáin
Ait Tí Conáin 2C	Saor	11/11/2011	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Ait Tí Conáin 2E	Saor	08/08/2015	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátBhéalanMhuirthhead
Béal an Mhuirthhead 2C	Saor	22/04/2010	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Béal an Mhuirthhead 2D	Saor	30/07/2008	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
Béal an Mhuirthhead 2G	Saor	31/10/1999	Monarchan	Réidh le ligean
				EastátBhunanChurraigh
Bun an Churraigh 3	Saor	27/11/2012	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Bun an Churraigh 4	Saor	22/02/2010	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Bun an Churraigh 5	Saor	17/10/2016	Fiontraíocht	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
Bun an Churraigh 6	Saor	27/11/2012	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				SuíomhSheanmonarchanThuarMhicÉadaigh
Tuar Mhic Éadaigh - Sean Mon	Saor	28/02/2007	Monarchan	Athchóiriú ag teastáil
				EastátThuarMhicÉadaigh
Tuar Mhic Éadaigh 2C	Saor	30/06/2011	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				Eachléim
Fiont. Eachléim 1A	Saor	07/01/2015	Ceardlann	Réidh le ligean
Fiont. Eachléim 1B	Saor	07/01/2015	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
Fiont. Eachléim 2	Saor	08/11/2016	Fiontraíocht	Réidh le ligean
				ÁislannBhéalanMhuirthhead
Aonad Traenála	Saor	05/11/2010	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
Oifig 3 (thuas staighre)	Saor	Nua	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				GobanChoire
Gob an Choire 1A&1I(cuid)	Saor	31/08/2008	Oifig	Réidh le ligean
				17 Aonad Ligeán Maigh Eo
	Iomlán Saor - 117			Réidh le ligean – 75 nó 65%

* Tá an foirgneamh seo i ndroc stáid agus ní raibh sé ligthe ag an Údarás riamh.

Special Areas of Conservation

85. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will remove Coolrain bog, County Laois from the list of bogs that are designated as special areas of conservation when the overall plan is being submitted to the EU Commission. [27546/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 2017-2022, due to be published in the coming period subject to Government approval, will set out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed. Within the framework of the Plan, my Department is considering the available options in terms of relocation of turf cutters to non-designated bogs and other alternatives and the invocation of certain provisions of the EU Habitats Directive. Under article 6.3 of the Directive consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation where it can be shown that such cutting will not have an adverse effect on the site. Under article 6.4 of the Directive consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and where there are no suitable alternatives.

Given the clear scientific evidence of the negative impact of turf extraction on raised bogs, it will only be possible to utilise the provisions of article 6.3 in a small number of cases. Similarly, the proof of overriding public interest under article 6.4 is very challenging and at best, will only be applicable to a small number of sites. In addition, if an article 6.4 case can be and is successfully made, compensatory measures will be required to offset the negative effects of any losses to the habitat concerned and to ensure the overall coherence of the raised bog special area of conservation network.

The position in relation to Coolrain Bog special area of conservation, amongst other sites, is being considered within the framework of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan.

Creative Ireland Programme

86. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to make departmental funding available for multicultural integration events to communities such as Kildare town, Newbridge and Athy which have a large multicultural society; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27576/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Taoiseach and I launched the Creative Ireland Programme 2017–2022 in December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach, the draft cultural policy which I published in July 2016.

As noted in my response to the Deputy on the 7 March last, this is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. It focuses on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

Pillar Two of the Programme – *Enabling creativity in every community* – is being implemented primarily through our local authorities who, as the primary instruments of community

engagement, have a particular capacity for engaging citizens through local programme delivery including cultural events.

Each local authority including Kildare has now established a Culture Team bringing together arts officers, librarians, heritage officers, museum curators, archivists and other relevant personnel led by a Director of Services, with a nominated person as ‘Creative Ireland Coordinator’. This approach allows each local authority to decide on what events/projects to support and consider for inclusion in their Culture and Creativity Plans, to suit the needs of the communities in their own area.

A dedicated budget of €1m from the overall Creative Ireland Programme budget of €5m has been allocated to the local authorities towards the implementation of initiatives under Pillar Two including the publication of a Culture and Creativity Plan for each county. These plans were launched by the Taoiseach on the 25 May 2017 and are available online at <https://creativeireland.ie/en/local-plans>. They include a series of projects that will utilise the funding I have provided as well as a list of promotional events occurring in each county throughout the year.

Additional support under Pillar Two will also be made available to the local authorities by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. I am confident that this funding, together with the Culture Teams being put in place, will go a long way to promoting cultural activity across the country including multicultural events.

Leader Programmes Administration

87. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has made changes to the Leader programme to simplify the procedures involved in rolling out the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27284/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The LEADER programme is a key part of the Government’s Action Plan for Rural Development and has the capacity to deliver significant outcomes for rural areas. I am committed to implementing the LEADER 2014-2020 programme as effectively and as efficiently as possible. However, I am also aware of concerns regarding some of the administrative procedures related to the programme, and I want to see these issues resolved to the greatest extent possible. In this regard, on 17th May last, I hosted a forum with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, to explore the issues of concern to them and to identify potential solutions aimed at streamlining the current administrative and application procedures.

The forum, which was attended by more than 70 people, was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined and where the burden on project applicants could be reduced.

On the basis of the feedback at the forum, I gave a commitment to the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies present that I would implement a number of the suggestions put forward, while being mindful of the regulatory requirements associated with this EU co-financed programme.

My officials have reviewed all of the contributions made at the forum and have identified a substantial number of changes that can be made to improve the delivery of the LEADER programme. I have written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies to update them on the changes that we intend to make, in partnership with them in many instances.

My priority, in hosting the recent forum and developing action points for improving the delivery of the programme, has been on facilitating the work of the Local Action Groups and making LEADER funding more accessible for potential project applicants. I am confident that the changes I am planning to introduce will improve the delivery of the LEADER programme to the benefit of rural communities throughout the country, and I expect to see a substantial increase in project approvals in the second half of 2017.

Action Plan for Rural Development

88. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way in which tourism projects such as the development of an amenity (details supplied) can benefit rural towns and villages in view of the action plan for rural development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27577/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Action Plan for Rural Development recognises the contribution that tourism makes to the rural economy and includes a series of actions to maximise Ireland's rural tourism and recreation potential.

Recreational tourism is a key growth sector worldwide and has been identified as a priority for Irish tourism in future years. The development and promotion of this sector provides opportunities for economic growth in rural areas in particular, by facilitating businesses to leverage the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as canoeing, cycling, angling and hill walking. These activities provide new incentives for people to visit an area and can attract a new profile of visitor.

The amenity referred to by the Deputy is part of Ireland's Ancient East and consists of a 70km walking trail along a path originally used by horses pulling barges and boats to warehouses and factories. There are a number of towns and villages along the route that provide a range of services and facilities to walkers and I believe that continued development of the amenity will serve to support the economic development of the area as a whole, as well as increasing the quality of the tourism offering to walkers along the route. The Action Plan for Rural Development will support sustainable jobs through targeted tourism initiatives, promoting recreational tourism, and developing and promoting our natural and built heritage, including in Gaeltacht areas.

Gorse Burning

89. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to strengthen enforcement regarding areas prone to gorse fire; her views on whether at present there are adequate fines and consequences for persons that start these fires; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27356/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I would like to thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. Significant environmental damage is caused by wildfires. This issue has become more acute in recent years, as evidenced by the spate of fires in various parts of the country, including a Coillte owned site of some 4,000 hectares Co. Galway in recent weeks.

Wild fires are not a natural phenomenon in Ireland and can have a local impact on species that cannot escape, or that lose breeding habitat as a result. Such impacts are generally fairly

short term, but could be very serious for species that are already in decline, such as curlew. Some plant and moss species may be lost or greatly reduced. UK research showed that where scrub such as gorse is burned it can have a lasting impact on soils and cause increased erosion which can in turn impact on rivers through increasing siltation of the water, especially if this burning happens repeatedly.

I would like to take this opportunity to strongly condemn the recent spate of wildfires and would appeal to members of the public to be conscious of the dangers posed by fire on open ground. The primary responsibility in terms of fire-fighting lies with the Fire Service and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. The prosecution of those responsible is a matter for the Gardaí. My Department is one of a number of agencies represented on the Inter-Agency Gorse Fire Group that explores issues surrounding such fires. An Garda Síochána is also represented on the Group and leads any criminal investigation. My Department, of course, cooperates fully with Garda investigations and any other investigations that may be initiated by other statutory bodies.

Film Industry Development

90. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will report on trainee programmes across the film industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27346/17]

114. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if all trainee programmes across the film industry are appropriately regulated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27347/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 114 together.

The Government supports the Irish audiovisual industry through the Irish Film Board and through Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 - the film tax relief scheme. This twin approach of direct funding and tax expenditure measures maximises the benefits of the Government's support to the audiovisual industry.

The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for Irish film making and the Irish film, television and animation industry. Screen Training Ireland is part of the Irish Film Board and is the national training and development resource specifically created for Ireland's film and television industry. Screen Training Ireland works with national and internationally recognised industry professionals to identify, design and deliver training for Irish professionals. Training programmes are offered to enhance expertise in Film, Television, Animation and interactive screen content.

Section 481 is an incentive to film and television production in Ireland. One of the requirements for receipt of the tax relief is the employment of trainees by the producer company. Specifically, the project must employ a minimum of two trainees for each €355,000 of corporation tax credit claimed, up to a maximum of 8 trainees.

The Irish Film Board and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland have commissioned a report on the skills needs of the Audiovisual industry in Ireland, which is currently being finalised and will make recommendations in relation to the operation of Section 481 as it applies to skills development. My Department will consider any recommendations contained in the Report, in consultation with the Film Board, once the Report is published.

It should also be noted that my Department has commissioned an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries, in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. Last month, as part of this process, I hosted a successful Media Production Workshop at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham for stakeholders in the film, broadcast, animation and gaming industries. The recommendations of the economic study will inform the development of a Government policy and a plan envisaged under the Creative Ireland Programme for the overall development of the audio visual sector in Ireland.

Action Plan for Rural Development

91. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to meetings between the Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and Natural Resources and his staff with a company (details supplied), the position regarding action 165 of the action plan for rural development specifically regarding the proposal to establish a residential education centre in Tullycross, Connemara, County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27613/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Action 165 of the Action Plan for Rural Development commits to examining the potential to promote rural Ireland as the destination of choice for US colleges wishing to avail of a rural-based learning or study experience abroad.

The company referred to by the Deputy has considerable experience in delivering rural-based learning in Connemara and is in the process of developing a residential education centre in Tullycross. The former Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs, along with an official, met with the company last month and they outlined their experience in this area, and discussed the potential for this model to work in other parts of rural Ireland.

The company has been involved in its own fund-raising efforts in relation to the centre in Tullycross. While the options for other avenues of funding were discussed with the company, there are no programmes under my Department's remit that can provide support to a project of this nature.

Responsibility for the Action Plan for Rural Development will be transferring to the new Department which the Taoiseach has announced will hold the brief for rural development and community development.

Local Authority Staff

92. **Deputy Ciarán Cannon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the work of the recently appointed broadband officers in the local authorities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27574/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which was published last December, recommended the assignment by each Local Authority of an officer with responsibility for broadband and mobile phone services. The function of this officer is to act as a single point of contact for telecommunications operators on the **rollout of telecommunications infrastructure**, as well as to increase awareness of, and stimulate demand for, broadband services. My Department has provided funding to all Local Authorities to support the assignment

of a Broadband Officer. **To date, 30 of the 31 Local Authorities have appointed a Broadband Officer. I understand that the remaining Local Authority is currently recruiting and is expected to appoint an officer shortly.**

The remit of the Broadband Officer is primarily to manage interactions with any company that is seeking to roll out telecommunications infrastructure in their county. The Broadband Officers will also work with the winning bidder(s) in respect of the rollout of the National Broadband Plan in the areas to be covered by State intervention. Broadband Officers are also involved in helping to develop local digital strategies to ensure that full use is made of the new broadband infrastructure once it is in place.

My Department has, additionally, established two regional Action Groups involving all of the Broadband Officers to ensure consistency in their engagement with the telecommunications operators and to identify and address obstacles to the rollout of telecoms infrastructure.

The telecommunications providers have widely welcomed the assignment the Broadband Officers by the Local Authorities and are actively engaging with them.

The appointment of Broadband Officers is just one of 40 actions contained in the report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. Along with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have been co-chairing an Implementation Group to drive the delivery of the actions in the report. Progress Reports from the Implementation Group will be published on a quarterly basis. The first Progress Report, covering Quarter 1 2017, has recently been published on the websites of both my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Leader Programmes Administration

93. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on whether the application process for the current Leader programme is too bureaucratic. [27586/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In total, €250 million will be invested in LEADER over the period to 2020. The programme is co-financed by the European Union to the value of €157 million through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and is subject to the EU Regulatory provisions governing rural development funding. It is important, therefore, that appropriate checks and balances are in place to ensure that the funding is delivered to the satisfaction of national and EU auditors. However, I also want to see the LEADER programme implemented as effectively and as efficiently as possible and I am aware of concerns regarding some of the administrative procedures related to the programme. Therefore, on 17th May last, I hosted a forum with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, to explore the issues of concern to them and to identify potential solutions aimed at streamlining the current administrative and application procedures.

The forum, which was attended by more than 70 people, was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined and where the burden on project applicants could be reduced.

On the basis of the feedback at the forum, I gave a commitment to the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies present that I would implement a number of the suggestions put forward, while being mindful of the regulatory requirements associated with this EU co-financed programme.

My officials have reviewed all of the contributions made at the forum and have identified a substantial number of changes that can be made to improve the delivery of the LEADER programme. I have written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies to update them on the changes that we intend to make, in partnership with them in many instances.

My priority, in hosting the recent forum and developing action points for improving the delivery of the programme, has been on facilitating the work of the Local Action Groups and making LEADER funding more accessible for potential project applicants. I am confident that the changes I am planning to introduce will improve the delivery of the LEADER programme to the benefit of rural communities throughout the country.

National Planning Framework

94. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her Department's input into the development of a new spatial strategy; if this strategy will provide the necessary provisions to enable rural areas to reach their full potential and ensure a fair share of State capital investment for rural areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27283/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The development of a new National Planning Framework (NPF), which will set out a new strategic planning and development context for Ireland out to 2040, is being led by the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. A public consultation process on the NPF was launched last February and ran to 16th March.

I met with the outgoing Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government at an early stage in the process and highlighted the importance of sustaining our rural communities and the enormous contribution that rural Ireland makes to our economy, our culture and our society.

There is regular bilateral engagement between my officials and officials in the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on the development of the NPF. My Department is also involved in the process through its membership of an Inter-Departmental Steering Group which is overseeing the preparation of the Framework.

The NPF will provide the basis for effective regional development and for the long-term sustainable development of our rural communities. I believe that strong regions will provide the basis for improving economic opportunities in rural areas and will help to retain people in rural areas and support sustainable communities.

Improved connectivity, whether through transport infrastructure or high-speed broadband, will be an important enabler to unlock the economic and social potential of rural areas.

My officials will continue to work closely with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to assist in finalising the National Planning Framework and to ensure that heritage, cultural and rural issues are taken into account.

Arts Council

95. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the actions her Department has taken further to the meeting she held with the Arts Council on 20 October 2015 to implement the money and policy review of the council; the discussions her Department has had since then with the council regarding the implementation

of the money and policy review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27512/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In September 2015, I published the first value for money policy review of the Arts Council. It was undertaken by the Department's Evaluation Unit under the guidance of an expert Steering Committee chaired by Dr. John O'Hagan, Professor of Economics at Trinity College. The review commended the Arts Council for its response to the economic crisis by significantly reducing administration costs; overhauling its organisational structures; and developing on its RAISE initiative, which helps arts organisations to diversify funding streams.

The review also highlighted the need for the Council to expand its efforts to improve transparency around its decision making; give greater consideration to addressing the issue of regional balance in accessing the arts; to engage more with stakeholders and establish the evidence-base for the societal benefits of its work.

The Department has encouraged the Arts Council to implement the recommendations and in this regard, the Council dedicated specific resources to implementing the review. In July 2016, the Arts Council published *Great Art Work: Three-Year Plan 2017–2019* which specifically addressed VFM recommendations within the context of delivering the three-year plan having mapped the recommendations from the VFMR against the Three-Year Plan.

Many of the recommendations have already been implemented and it is expected that the process will be complete by 2018. The requirements of the implementation process are incorporated into the annual programme delivery agreements between the Department and the Council. In the context, the Department discusses the implementation process with the Arts Council at its regular liaison meetings.

Western Development Commission Funding

96. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to give further funding and functions to the Western Development Commission; her further plans to extend its geographic remit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27285/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Western Development Commission was established in 1999 to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region, defined as the counties of Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare. The Commission has achieved a lot for the region since its establishment. However, there have also been a number of important policy and operational developments at regional level in recent years, including the introduction of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs process and the enactment of a statutory role for the Local Authorities and the Regional Assemblies in local and regional economic development. The *Programme for a Partnership Government* includes a specific commitment to reinforce the role of the WDC so that it continues to play an important role in light of these developments in the Government's efforts to achieve more effective regional development across the country.

In this context, the WDC has been involved in an increasing number of initiatives, some of which go beyond the role the body has played to date, and which can develop its potential further.

For example:

- The WDC is represented on the Implementing Committees which oversee the delivery of the Action Plans for Jobs for the West and North-West regions.

- The body is also represented on the Monitoring Committee for the Action Plan for Rural Development. The WDC is assisting my Department, as part of a sub-group of the Monitoring Committee, in developing indicators to measure the impact of the Action Plan on rural communities.

- The Commission is also represented on a new Taskforce to progress the concept of an Atlantic Economic Corridor along the western seaboard. The WDC has been involved in a sub-group of the Taskforce which is mapping out the options for EU funding which could support the development of the Western region.

- The WDC has also assisted my Department in participating in, and reporting on, a public Dialogue on the implications of Brexit for areas such as rural communities, regional SMEs, culture, the Irish language, and heritage and outdoor recreation.

There are no plans at present to extend the geographical remit of the WDC and any increase in funding would be considered in the context of the annual Estimates process. However, my Department will continue to work with the WDC and draw on its expertise to support the economic and social development of the Western region.

Maoiniú d'Eagrais Ghaeilge

97. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an raibh comhráite aici leis an Aire Caiteachais Phoiblí maidir le breis maoinithe a chur ar fáil d'earnáil na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta de réir gealltanais a tugadh nuair a bunaíodh an rialtas seo maidir le maoiniú breise don earnáil seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [27282/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Is tríd an phróiseas meastacháin agus cáinainnéise a dhéantar leithdháileadh ar an soláthar airgid a chuirtear ar fáil ar bhonn bhliantúil do mo Roinn agus, go deimhin, do na Ranna Rialtais go léir.

Sa chomhthéacs sin, tuigfidh an Teachta go ndéanfar soláthar airgid do na heagraíochtaí Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta don bhliain 2018 a mheas i gcomhthéacs an phróisis sin níos déanaí i mbliana. Is féidir leis an Teachta glacadh leis go leanfaidh mé, feadh mo chumais, ag lorg acmhainní breise don earnáil Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta, laistigh den oll-sholáthar airgeadais atá ar fáil don Rialtas.

Maidir le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta ach go háirithe, bhí €1m breise i maoiniú caipitil aonuaire faighte ag an eagraíocht seo mar chuid de Mheastacháin Athbhreithnithe 2016. Tá sé seo coinneithe don bhliain reatha, rud a chiallaíonn gurb é €6.687m an bunlíne nua caipitil d'Údarás na Gaeltachta i mbliana, €1m níos airde ná an bunlíne i mBuiséid 2016. Anuas air sin, cuireadh allúntas breise caipitil de €2.4m ar fáil don Údarás i 2016. Cuireadh allúntas breise reatha de €250,000 ar fáil don eagraíocht chomh maith i mbliana le cabhrú leis na comharchumainn agus na heagraíochtaí phobalbhunaithe Gaeltachta a gcuid costas reáchtála a chlúdach.

Maidir leis an bhForas Teanga, beidh áthas ar an Teachta a chloisteáil gur cuireadh allúntas breise de €750,000 ar fáil i mbliana le dáileadh ar Fhoras na Gaeilge agus Bord na hUltaise.

Scéimeanna Teanga

98. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cá mhéad plean teanga atá curtha faoina bráid agus atá ceadaithe aici; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [27612/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Den 26 limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeltachta atá aitheanta faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, tá an próiseas tosaithe i 23 limistéar agus táthar ag súil leis go mbeidh sé tosaithe sa trí limistéar eile faoi dheireadh na bliana, eadhon: Bearna agus Cnoc na Cathrach; Oirthear Chathair na Gaillimhe; agus an tEachréidh. Go dtí seo, tá pleananna teanga i leith trí limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeltachta: Gaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste, Anagaire & Loch an Iúir; Cois Fharraige; agus Cloich Chionnaola, Gort an Choirce, An Fál Carrach agus Machaire Rabhartaigh curtha faoi bhráid mo Roinne le bheith faofa faoin Acht. Tá súil agam go mbeidh na pleananna seo scrúdaithe ag mo Roinn go luath agus moltaí i leith na limistéar sin á gcur faoi mo bhráid ina dhiaidh sin.

Beifear ag súil leis go gcuirfear pleananna i leith na limistéar a leanas faoi bhráid mo Roinne le bheith faofa idir seo agus deireadh na bliana:

- Ciarraí Thiar;
- Ciarraí Theas;
- Na Déise;
- Árainn Mhór;
- Dún na nGall Theas;
- An Cheathrú Rua;
- Múscraí;
- Dúiche Sheoigheach & Tuar Mhic Éadaigh; agus,
- Conamara Láir.

CLÁR Programme

99. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the 2017 CLÁR programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27443/17]

Minister without Portfolio (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31st March 2017 and will provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. Funding is available this year under four separate Measures: Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure

Measure 4: First Responder Supports

Applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3 were submitted through the Local Authorities, while Measure 4 was targeted at voluntary organisations involved in emergency rescue or first-response efforts. The closing date for applications under the 2017 CLÁR programme was 5th May 2017 and over 500 **applications were received across the four measures.**

Successful projects were announced over the last few weeks, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects across the four Measures. Details of the approved projects are available on the Rural Affairs pages of the website www.ahrrga.gov.ie. Payments will, in general, be made to the successful applicants on a phased basis when the projects have commenced and have made a satisfactory level of progress.

The CLÁR programme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, and makes a huge contribution to supporting the most depopulated areas in rural Ireland. Over 800 projects have now been approved for funding since the scheme was re-launched last year.

Arts Promotion

100. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department has carried out research into Iceland's policies on arts and culture and in particular a policy (details supplied); if she will consider establishing a similar resource for the Irish music industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27359/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am pleased to confirm to the Deputy that Ireland has a very strong presence in the international music arena. There are a number of organisations in receipt of state support whose remit is to build and develop the career of musicians, grow their audiences at home and working with Culture Ireland, a division of my own Department develop their careers internationally. Similar to Iceland Music Export, Music from Ireland is the Irish Music Export programme run by First Music Contact in partnership with Culture Ireland which funds and presents the Irish Showcases at large international showcases. In 2017, the Music from Ireland programme will present Irish musicians at 10 separate international industry showcase events including South by Southwest in Austin, Texas, The Great Escape in Brighton and Airwaves in Reykjavik, Iceland.

In addition, First Music Contact organises Hard Working Class Heroes in Dublin each autumn. Over the course of a weekend, over 100 music acts perform at six venues across Dublin. The audience includes industry professionals who have travelled to Dublin with support offered by the Government, through my Department's Culture Ireland division.

In addition to its work in the international sphere, First Music Contact (FMC) provides free information and an advice resource for musicians and independent music sector in Ireland. First Music Contact develops projects at key stages of an artist's career, providing helpful hints and tips written by leading representatives in the global music industry from bloggers to radio DJs and venues.

For music genres outside of rock and pop, Culture Ireland supports Irish attendance by artists at other prestigious international showcase events including WOMEX World Music Expo, Folk Alliance International, jazzahead! and Classical:NEXT.

These interventions have demonstrated tangible outcomes for the artists themselves with international tour bookings, management and publishing deals.

Culture Ireland and First Music Contact through their international activity continue to keep abreast of current music industry showcase opportunities.

Departmental Funding

101. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the proposed new town hall in Ballinrobe on the site of the old town hall; if the funding has been made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27615/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I, along with Minister Michael Ring T.D., met with the Ballinrobe Town Hall Committee in April last at their request. During the meeting, the Committee presented its vision for a new town hall in Ballinrobe and outlined the business plan underpinning the venture. The Committee was interested in exploring whether any funding options were available from my Department which could support their own considerable fund-raising efforts. In this context, the discussion centred on the LEADER programme.

LEADER funding is delivered through Local Action Groups in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the country. The approval of LEADER funding for individual projects is a matter for the Local Action Groups in their respective areas and I have no function in relation to such matters.

In order for a project to be eligible for LEADER funding, it must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy in the sub-regional area concerned, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

I understand that the Ballinrobe Town Hall Committee has been actively engaging with the LEADER structures in Mayo and that they are being assisted by the LEADER Local Action Group in the county.

Any decision to approve funding in respect of the proposed Ballinrobe Town Hall project will be a matter for the Mayo Local Action Group.

Special Areas of Conservation

102. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of the assessment of Coolrain bog special area of conservation, County Laois being conducted by consultants working on behalf of her Department; and the date on which she expects this to be completed. [27545/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 2017-2022, due to be published in the coming period subject to Government approval, will set out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed.

Within the framework of the Plan, my Department is considering the available options in terms of relocation of turf cutters to non-designated bogs and other alternatives and the invocation of certain provisions of the EU Habitats Directive. Under article 6.3 of the Directive consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation where it can be shown that such cutting will not have an adverse effect on the site. Under article 6.4 of the

Directive consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and where there are no suitable alternatives.

Scientific contractors engaged by my Department have undertaken a preliminary review of the eco-hydrological conditions present on Coolrain Bog special area of conservation to examine the potential for continued turf-cutting on the site in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive. A separate Raised Bog Monitoring and Assessment Survey report was prepared to outline the current ecological condition and location of active raised bog habitat and other raised bog habitats, listed in Annex 1 of the Directive, on the site.

The results of these studies are being considered by my Department within the framework of the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 2017-2022.

Arts in Education Charter

103. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the level of engagement her Department has had with the Department of Education and Skills to implement the recommendations of the arts in education charter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27571/17]

109. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she has taken to develop arts in education practices by professional artists in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27570/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 109 together.

The Creative Ireland Programme, which the Taoiseach and I launched in December, places a special focus on “Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child”. Building on the Arts in Education Charter this will involve the development of an integrated plan – Creative Children - to enable every child in Ireland to access tuition in music, drama, art and coding by 2022. My Department officials continue to work with relevant Departments and other stakeholders with a view to launching this plan in Autumn 2017.

The Creative Children plan will build on work to date in implementing the Arts in Education Charter to include the delivery of arts rich schools, making the arts a key part of school life across the country. My Department continues to work closely with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Youth and Children Affairs and the Arts Council to deliver the key objectives of the Charter within the wider context now of the Creative Ireland Programme to include non-mainstream education.

I am pleased to say that continuing professional development through teacher - artist partnerships is ongoing and this July will see a significant increase in the number of courses taking place across twenty one Education Centres throughout the country.

Arising from the significant increase of support of €5m which I secured for the Arts Council as part of Budget 2017, I am also pleased that the Arts Council increased funding in this area for 2017 from €3.1m in 2016 to €3.7m this year.

These initiatives demonstrate the overall commitment of Government to deliver for children as we work in finalising the Creative Children plan.

Dormant Accounts Fund

104. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her future plans for the dormant accounts scheme which is administered by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27515/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post), and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings. The Dormant Accounts Fund is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency.

The Acts provide for the disbursement of funds for the purposes of programmes or projects to assist:

- the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
- the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged; or
- persons with a disability.

My Department's role in relation to the Dormant Accounts Fund is to prepare a Disbursement Scheme every three years, which sets out the objectives to be achieved by making disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund and the strategies for achieving those objectives. My Department also co-ordinates the preparation of annual Action Plans in accordance with the three-year Disbursement Scheme. The Action Plans contain the details of specific programmes and projects for delivery across Government Departments.

A Disbursement Scheme for the period 2017-2019 was approved by Government on the 26th April 2017 and my Department is currently finalising a new Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 2017, following a detailed consultation process across Government Departments.

It is anticipated that the responsibility for the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursement Scheme and annual Action Plans will be transferring to the new Department with responsibility for rural development and community development.

Architectural Heritage

105. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps her Department has taken to protect heritage structures in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27516/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the roles of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) is a State initiative to identify, record, and evaluate the post-1700 built heritage of Ireland, as an aid to its protection and conservation. The NIAH, which operates within my Department, has published surveys in respect of both Sligo and Leitrim and these have formed the basis for Ministerial recommendations to

both local authorities for additions to their Record of Protected Structures. My Department has also published an introductory book to the built heritage of both counties.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures (i.e. structures on the local authority Record of Protected Structures). I recently announced an allocation of €3.5m for over five hundred projects across the country, which will be supported by the scheme in 2017, including over €100,000 for sixteen projects in Sligo and three projects in Leitrim. The scheme will create employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures which are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. Structures must be on the local authority Record of Protected Structures. The fund, administered through the local authorities, seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost. I recently announced an allocation of over €1.3m for 67 projects countrywide that will be supported under the Structures at Risk Fund for 2017, including nearly €70,000 for three projects in Sligo and one project in Leitrim.

Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000 gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to identify and protect the architectural heritage by including relevant structures on the Record of Protected Structures. This places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities powers to deal with development proposals affecting them and to seek to safeguard their future. The latest returns to my Department from the local authorities indicate 272 structures on the Record of Protected Structures in Leitrim and 699 in Sligo.

I also have a role, as Minister, in terms of being a prescribed body under the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, whereby development proposals that may impact on our built heritage are referred by planning authorities to my Department so that recommendations can be made as appropriate to avoid or mitigate any such impacts.

Departmental Policy Functions

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the detail of her Department's ongoing work on the national cultural strategy up to 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27511/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Last July I published the draft framework policy Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach, which was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for input. I understand that the Committee is currently finalising a report on the draft framework policy which I will consider when received. I have also received submissions from various organisations on the draft document. Following receipt of the report from the Committee, it is my intention to finalise the Policy.

In the meantime, as referred to in my reply to the Deputy on 7 March, in December last, the Taoiseach and I launched the Creative Ireland Programme as the Government's Legacy Programme arising out of the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in Culture 2025.

The Creative Ireland Programme is a high-level, high-ambition, all-of-Government initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation. It focuses on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities, and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by

the 2016 commemorative programme.

An enabling budget of €5m has been allocated to the Creative Ireland Programme in 2017 and detailed plans for its implementation are currently being drawn up by my Department in consultation with partners across Government and with other key stakeholders. This includes an ambitious plan to deliver several initiatives by the end of 2017. Further details of these initiatives are available on <http://creative.ireland.ie>.

Hen Harriers Threat Response Plan

107. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the hen harrier threat response plan will be published. [27960/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Officials from my Department are working with the key Departments to finalise the draft Plan very soon. It will be shared for discussion with the Stakeholder Consultative Committee and will then undergo a public consultation and screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

Substantial work has been, and is being, carried out by my Department, and the other stakeholders, in setting the key issues around managing the recovery and conservation of the hen harrier population in Ireland, with full recognition of the concerns of landowners and the other key groups involved in the development of this Plan.

Leader Programmes

108. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the outcome of the forum she held with local action groups and the local development companies in relation to Leader; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27593/17]

113. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she proposes to introduce improvements to the Leader administrative procedures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27592/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 113 together.

The LEADER programme is a key part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and has the capacity to deliver significant outcomes for rural areas.

I am committed to implementing the LEADER 2014-2020 programme as effectively and as efficiently as possible. However, I am also aware of concerns regarding some of the administrative procedures related to the programme, and I want to see these issues resolved to the greatest extent possible. In this regard, on 17th May last, I hosted a forum with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, to explore the issues of concern to them and to identify potential solutions aimed at streamlining the current administrative and application procedures.

The forum, which was attended by more than 70 people, was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined and where the burden on project applicants could be reduced.

On the basis of the feedback at the forum, I gave a commitment to the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies present that I would implement a number of the suggestions put forward, while being mindful of the regulatory requirements associated with this EU co-financed programme.

My officials have reviewed all of the contributions made at the forum and have identified a substantial number of changes that can be made to improve the delivery of the LEADER programme. I have written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies to update them on the changes that we intend to make, in partnership with them in many instances.

My priority, in hosting the recent forum and developing action points for improving the delivery of the programme, has been on facilitating the work of the Local Action Groups and making LEADER funding more accessible for potential project applicants. I am confident that the changes I am planning to introduce will improve the delivery of the LEADER programme to the benefit of rural communities throughout the country, and I expect to see a substantial increase in project approvals in the second half of 2017.

Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 103.

Animal Welfare

110. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the attention of NPWS officials has been drawn to suspected cases of badger baiting in the past 12 months; if so, the details of those cases; and the outcome of investigations. [27348/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Officials of my Department monitor compliance with the Wildlife Acts across the country on an on-going basis and carry out patrols and site visits to enforce the various provisions of these Acts, as required. Many of these officers carry out work in more than one county. They also investigate reports of breaches of the Acts including illegal snaring or “digging out” of badgers etc., with a view to initiating prosecutions where there is sufficient evidence to support same. Members of An Garda Síochána are also empowered under the Acts to investigate alleged offences and to prosecute if they see fit. No prosecutions have been initiated by the NPWS in respect of badger-related wildlife offences in the last year. The last prosecution on record in my Department dates to September 2015, when the individual concerned pleaded guilty to two charges.

Action Plan for Rural Development

111. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount of funding detailed in the action plan for rural development that has been spent to date in 2017; and the number of persons or organisations that have financially benefitted from the town and village renewal scheme, a framework for town centre revival, the regional arts and cultural centres under the arts and culture capital scheme and the CLÁR programme. [27587/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): *The Action Plan for Rural Development provides a framework for the coordinated delivery of over 270 actions across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies to support the economic and social development of rural areas. These actions will*

see a multi-million Euro investment in schemes, programmes and projects which will benefit rural Ireland. Details of expenditure incurred in relation to individual actions in the Plan would be a matter for the relevant lead Department or body delivering the action. However, from my own Department's perspective, the Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in April last and will provide funding of €20 million to up to 300 rural towns and villages over the next 12 months. The closing date for receipt of applications under this scheme is 30th June 2017; therefore no expenditure has yet been incurred under the 2017 scheme. In 2016, just under €10 million was allocated to 170 projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

Earlier this year, I announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for 62 arts and culture centres across the country. This scheme will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. A full list of organisations to benefit from funding under Stream 1 and 2 of the Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website at www.ahrrga.gov.ie/minister-humphreys-announces-capital-funding-of-more-than-e9m-for-arts-and-cultural-centres/.

I also recently announced a new small capital grants Scheme (Stream 3) which will provide grants of up to €20,000 to not-for-profit organisations with a defined arts and cultural remit. Organisations with artists' studios were also eligible to apply under this new scheme, which had a closing date of 16 June 2017.

The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched in March, with applications invited under four different Measures. A total of just under €7 million has been allocated to approximately 230 projects across the four Measures over the last number of weeks. Details of the approved projects are available on my Department's website at www.ahrrga.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/clar-2016/. Payments will, in general, be made to the successful applicants on a phased basis when the projects have commenced and have made a satisfactory level of progress.

Rural Recreation Promotion

112. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to expand the rural recreation programme in view of the increase in popularity of greenways and blueways; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27444/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Action Plan for Rural Development acknowledges the increasing popularity of recreational and activity tourism and includes a series of actions to maximise Ireland's rural tourism and recreation potential. The 2017 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme was launched on 28th April 2017 and will provide funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure or the necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. Building on the 2016 Rural Recreation Scheme, the 2017 scheme has been enhanced and will provide funding of €11 million over a period of 15 months under the following measures:

Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing

Measure 2: Medium Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Trail Development

Measure 3: Large Scale Repair/Upgrade and New Strategy Trail Development

Details of the scheme are available at: www.ahrrga.gov.ie/minister-ring-launches-e11-million-outdoor-recreation-infrastructure-scheme-for-2017/.

The deadline for submission of applications under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme has just passed. A large number of applications have been received and will be assessed by my Department. The successful applicants will be notified as soon as possible following the assessment process.

The all-island body Waterways Ireland, which is co-funded by my Department, is responsible for the management, maintenance, development, and restoration of inland navigable waterways, primarily for recreational purposes. The body is responsible for developing and promoting Blueways on the Royal, Grand and Barrow Canals, and on the Shannon Navigation to expand their recreational and tourism offering. Waterways Ireland will make a capital investment of €6 million in Blueways over the period 2017-2019.

My Department also supports the ongoing maintenance of established walking trails all over Ireland through the Walks Scheme. A total of 39 trails are currently covered by the scheme. The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Ireland include a commitment to double the walks scheme during the lifetime of the Government and officials in my Department are currently examining ways in which this can be progressed.

Overall responsibility for policy and development of Greenways rests with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Minister recently launched a public consultation process on a “Strategy for the Future Development of Greenways”, details of which can be found at www.dttas.ie/publications.

Question No. 113 answered with Question No. 108.

Question No. 114 answered with Question No. 90.

Departmental Expenditure

115. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the expenses incurred by his Department on insurance of all types of in each of the past five years; the cost of each insurance policy held by his Department over the same time period per annum; and the same data for all bodies under the aegis of his Department [26513/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) operate under State indemnity, a self-insurance model whereby the State bears the financial risk associated with the cost of claims. The management of such claims is delegated to the State Claims Agency.

NESDO came under the ambit of the State Claims Agency in 2014. Prior to this NESDO was required to hold separate insurance cover. Details of expenditure on insurance by NESDO is set out below. In recent years expenditure on insurance cover has been for business travel insurance only.

NESDO

Year	Amount
2013	€1,824.95
2014	€467.51
2015	€467.51
2016	€467.49
2017	€485.90

Citizens Assembly

116. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach the full costs of the Citizens' Assembly. [26514/17]

The Taoiseach: As the Assembly has not yet completed its work, it is not possible at this stage to indicate the total cost of its operation. A budget of €1.906 million has been set aside for 2017 for the Assembly.

Company Data

117. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach the number of company groups with a presence both here and in the United Kingdom; and the sectors in which they are operating [26561/17]

The Taoiseach: The CSO Outward Foreign Affiliates Survey (OFATS) surveys Irish enterprises with affiliates abroad. This is an annual survey, and the latest results available are for reference year 2014. Results for 2015 will be available in August 2017.

The survey indicates that in 2014 there were nearly 200 Irish owned enterprises with affiliates in the UK. These enterprises generated €37.6 billion turnover and had over 86,000 persons in employment in the UK. Most of these enterprises operated in the Financial & Insurance, Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, Professional, Information & communications and Manufacturing sectors, with a limited number elsewhere in the UK business economy.

Further details can be found in the OFATS statistical release at <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ofats/outwardforeignaffiliatesstatistics2014/>

Census of Population Data

118. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Taoiseach if his attention has been drawn to the reported incorrect 2016 census figures regarding Ballina, County Mayo, issued by the CSO; and if so, the measures planned by the CSO to correct this matter in view of the damage that this reporting has done to the town. [26571/17]

The Taoiseach: There have been no incorrect figures reported for Ballina or any other town from census 2016.

Following every census the CSO publishes statistics on the population of towns in Ireland. Up to and including census 2011 this covered 80 legal towns, of which Ballina was one, along with some 744 census towns, or settlements.

Census towns without a legal boundary are defined as a cluster of at least 50 occupied homes with a maximum distance between them of no more than 100 metres and evidence of an urban centre, such as a shop or school within the cluster.

Following each census the boundary of the settlement can be extended outwards to encompass each occupied dwelling within 100 metres. In the case of legal towns such as Ballina the boundary has traditionally been extended out from the original legal boundary using the 100m rule. In 2011 the legal town of Ballina has a population of 10,361 while the settlement of Ballina, which took the legal town boundary as its starting point, had a population of 11,086.

The 2014 Local Government Reform Act abolished the existing legal town boundaries, including those for Ballina. Accordingly when drawing the new town boundaries for these old legal towns the CSO applied the UN settlement criteria in full, using the 100 metre criteria. The result was that some towns, including Ballina, lost both area and population while for others there was little effect. This was explained in the background notes that accompanied the results, as follows:

‘Census towns which previously combined legal towns and their environs have been newly defined using the standard census town criteria (with the 100 metres proximity rule). For some towns the impact of this has been to lose area and population, compared with previous computations.’

For 2016 the population of the town of Ballina, defined on the UN criteria without reference to the now abolished legal boundary, was 10,171. In acknowledgement of the difficulties these boundary changes might cause the CSO also published a table showing the population of former legal towns for both 2011 and 2016. The figures for Ballina are as follows.

#	Census				Actual change 2011 - 2016	Percentage change 2011 - 2016
	2011	2016				
	Persons	Persons	Male	Female		
Bal- lina Legal Town** using old boundary	10,361	10,637	5,175	5,462	276	2.7

The CSO acknowledges that the change in approach to how a town is defined has led to difficulties in comparisons between census data in 2011 and 2016. In recognition of this, the CSO has updated the statistical tables to present the data in a way that makes these boundary changes clearer to the user.

We are confident that the new methodology will provide a sound basis for producing accurate census population statistics for Ireland’s towns into the future.

Central Statistics Office Data

119. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach if the CSO will produce more granular data on the cases of white collar crime. [26590/17]

The Taoiseach: The CSO compiles quarterly statistics on recorded crime incidents in Ireland. Crime statistics are based on administrative data recorded on PULSE, the incident recording system used by An Garda Síochána. The CSO disseminates crime statistics according to the Irish Crime Classification System (ICCS). The term ‘white collar crime’ is not currently defined for incident recording or statistical purposes but Group 09 of the classification ‘Fraud, Deception and Related Offences’ comprises a variety of fraud-related incident types including, for example, forgery, counterfeiting, money laundering and corruption. The CSO currently publishes quarterly data for Group 09 of the ICCS and will examine the possibility of producing more disaggregated data for this category. See annual data in the table below.

Recorded Crime Offences (Number) by Type of Offence and Year

#	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
09, Fraud, deception and related offences	5,370	5,790	4,824	5,178	5,579	4,902

Exports Data

120. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the amount in euro in value of both goods and services exported from Irish-based firms broken down by each country worldwide in 2015 and 2016, in tabular form; the percentage share of such exports to each country in this period as a proportion of the total share; and the total numbers of persons employed in such firms. [26410/17]

The Taoiseach: The official measure of Ireland's combined goods and service exports with a breakdown by country are published by the Central Statistics Office in the Statistical Yearbook of Ireland. The latest edition of the Yearbook contains data for 2015. Publication of the results for 2016 is planned for October 2017.

The table below is compiled using 2015 trade in goods exports data by country, as published monthly by the CSO, with conceptual adjustments added to bring goods exports to a change of ownership basis as required by the Balance of Payments and National Accounts standards. Service exports data are then added to give total exports from Ireland to each county of destination.

The CSO does not compile results for employment data by exporting firms.

Exports of Goods and Services 2015

Country/Region	€million	% Share
Afghanistan	5	0.00
Albania	15	0.00
Algeria	100	0.03
American Samoa	1	0.00
Andorra	1	0.00
Angola	38	0.01
Anguilla	1	0.00
Argentina	310	0.10
Armenia	-1	0.00
Australia	3,807	1.20
Austria	1,768	0.56
Azerbaijan	18	0.01
Bahamas	31	0.01
Bahrain	89	0.03
Bangladesh	15	0.00
Barbados	-272	-0.09
Belarus	26	0.01
Belgium	19,471	6.14
Belize	2	0.00
Benin	7	0.00
Bermuda	19	0.01
Bolivia	11	0.00

Questions - Written Answers

Country/Region	€million	% Share
Bonaire St Eustatius Saba	0	0.00
Bosnia and Herzegovina	25	0.01
Bouvet Island	0	0.00
Brazil	1,275	0.40
Brunei Darussalam	12	0.00
Bulgaria	191	0.06
Burkina Faso	9	0.00
Burundi	0	0.00
Cambodia	4	0.00
Cameroon	39	0.01
Canada	2,870	0.90
Cayman Islands	415	0.13
Central African Republic	0	0.00
Chad	1	0.00
Chile	349	0.11
China	18,030	5.68
Christmas Island	0	0.00
Cocos (Keeling) Islands	0	0.00
Colombia	270	0.09
Comoros	0	0.00
Congo	77	0.02
Congo The Democratic Republic	15	0.00
Cook Islands	0	0.00
Costa Rica	39	0.01
Cote d'Ivoire	12	0.00
Croatia	115	0.04
Cuba	6	0.00
Cyprus	-190	-0.06
Czech Republic	732	0.23
Denmark	2,549	0.80
Djibouti	0	0.00
Dominica	1	0.00
Dominican Republic	14	0.00
Ecuador	33	0.01
Egypt	545	0.17
El Salvador	29	0.01
Equatorial Guinea	1	0.00
Eritrea	0	0.00
Estonia	42	0.01
Ethiopia	93	0.03
Falkland Islands (Malvinas)	0	0.00
Faroe Islands	3	0.00
Finland	1,629	0.51
France	16,261	5.13
Gabon	7	0.00
Gambia	1	0.00
Georgia	19	0.01
Germany	25,707	8.10
Ghana	52	0.02
Gibraltar	91	0.03
Greece	621	0.20

Country/Region	€million	% Share
Grenada	0	0.00
Guadeloupe	0	0.00
Guam	1	0.00
Guatemala	30	0.01
Guernsey	46	0.01
Guinea	2	0.00
Guinea-Bissau	0	0.00
Guyana	2	0.00
Haiti	1	0.00
Honduras	4	0.00
Hong Kong	1,274	0.40
Hungary	1,773	0.56
Iceland	199	0.06
India	3,813	1.20
Indonesia	387	0.12
Iran Islamic Republic of	76	0.02
Iraq	82	0.03
Isle of Man	107	0.03
Israel	2,537	0.80
Italy	14,190	4.47
Jamaica	8	0.00
Japan	8,266	2.61
Jersey	9	0.00
Jordan	129	0.04
Kazakhstan	161	0.05
Kenya	161	0.05
Kiribati	0	0.00
Korea Republic of	1,324	0.42
Kuwait	202	0.06
Kyrgyzstan	1	0.00
Lao People's Democratic Republic	7	0.00
Latvia	112	0.04
Lebanon	123	0.04
Lesotho	1	0.00
Liberia	5	0.00
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	73	0.02
Lithuania	105	0.03
Luxembourg	-1,763	-0.56
Macedonia The Former Yugoslav Republic of	13	0.00
Madagascar	0	0.00
Malawi	4	0.00
Malaysia	521	0.16
Mali	24	0.01
Malta	148	0.05
Martinique	0	0.00
Mauritania	1	0.00
Mauritius	21	0.01
Mayotte	0	0.00
Mexico	1,838	0.58
Moldova Republic of	5	0.00

Questions - Written Answers

Country/Region	€million	% Share
Mongolia	6	0.00
Montenegro	14	0.00
Montserrat	0	0.00
Morocco	142	0.04
Mozambique	12	0.00
Myanmar	14	0.00
Namibia	4	0.00
Nauru	0	0.00
Nepal	1	0.00
Netherlands	12,689	4.00
New Caledonia	6	0.00
New Zealand	329	0.10
Nicaragua	2	0.00
Niger	0	0.00
Nigeria	447	0.14
Northern Mariana Islands	0	0.00
Norway	2,107	0.66
Oman	140	0.04
Pakistan	187	0.06
Palestinian Territory Occupied	7	0.00
Panama	78	0.02
Papua New Guinea	2	0.00
Paraguay	9	0.00
Peru	57	0.02
Philippines	340	0.11
Poland	2,427	0.77
Portugal	1,393	0.44
Puerto Rico	26	0.01
Qatar	345	0.11
Romania	477	0.15
Russian Federation	969	0.31
Saint Barthelemy	0	0.00
Saint Helena	0	0.00
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1	0.00
Saint Lucia	2	0.00
Saint Vincent and the Grenadin	0	0.00
Samoa	2	0.00
San Marino	0	0.00
Sao tome and Principe	0	0.00
Saudi Arabia	1,655	0.52
Senegal	43	0.01
Serbia	48	0.02
Seychelles	2	0.00
Sierra Leone	2	0.00
Singapore	5,745	1.81
Slovakia	175	0.06
Slovenia	102	0.03
Solomon Islands	0	0.00
Somalia	3	0.00
South Africa	1,679	0.53

20 June 2017

Country/Region	€million	% Share
South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands	0	0.00
South Sudan	0	0.00
Spain	10,632	3.35
Sri Lanka	23	0.01
St Maarten	1	0.00
Sudan	11	0.00
Suriname	0	0.00
Swaziland	3	0.00
Sweden	4,609	1.45
Switzerland	9,444	2.98
Syrian Arab Republic	7	0.00
Taiwan Province of China	745	0.23
Tajikistan	2	0.00
Tanzania United Republic of	19	0.01
Thailand	394	0.12
Timor-Leste	1	0.00
Togo	16	0.01
Tokelau	1	0.00
Tonga	3	0.00
Trinidad and Tobago	50	0.02
Tunisia	48	0.02
Turkey	2,158	0.68
Turkmenistan	3	0.00
Turks and Caicos Islands	0	0.00
Uganda	3	0.00
Ukraine	83	0.03
United Arab Emirates	2,332	0.74
United Kingdom	51,266	16.16
United States	48,728	15.36
Uruguay	97	0.03
US Minor outlying islands	6	0.00
Uzbekistan	9	0.00
Vatican City State	0	0.00
Venezuela	45	0.01
Viet Nam	292	0.09
Virgin Islands British	53	0.02
Virgin Islands US	8	0.00
Wallis and Futuna	0	0.00
Yemen	11	0.00
Zambia	12	0.00
Zimbabwe	2	0.00
Countries/International Organisations not included above	20,912	6.59
Total	317,197	
Negative amounts are due to merchanting activity		

Exports Data

121. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the amount in euro in value of goods only exported from Irish-based firms broken down by each country worldwide in 2015 and 2016, in tabular form; and the percentage share of such exports to each country in this period as a proportion of the total share. [26411/17]

The Taoiseach: In 2016 Ireland exported goods to 222 countries. The table below shows the top 25 trading partners covering 92% of total trade.

Table A : Exports of Goods by country 2015-2016 and percentage share of total trade.

	2015 €000's	2016 €000's	% of total 2015	% of total 2016
United States	26,861,438	30,412,798	23.9	25.9
Belgium	14,542,043	14,672,117	12.9	12.5
Great Britain	13,810,026	13,371,251	12.3	11.4
Germany	7,477,241	8,020,098	6.7	6.8
Switzerland	6,096,406	6,318,464	5.4	5.4
Netherlands	4,986,483	5,922,920	4.4	5.0
France	4,876,934	5,068,816	4.3	4.3
China	1,655,449	3,051,485	1.5	2.6
Spain	4,021,070	2,973,468	3.6	2.5
Japan	3,890,111	2,886,878	3.5	2.5
Italy	2,546,438	2,410,512	2.3	2.0
Northern Ireland	1,744,125	1,650,067	1.6	1.4
Australia	924,962	1,475,938	0.8	1.3
Israel	870,640	1,474,970	0.8	1.3
Poland	1,187,421	1,373,238	1.1	1.2
Mexico	1,394,459	1,358,107	1.2	1.2
Canada	891,107	936,319	0.8	0.8
South Korea	517,747	930,360	0.5	0.8
Saudi Arabia	998,947	815,653	0.9	0.7
Sweden	999,702	787,445	0.9	0.7
Hong Kong	626,378	656,051	0.6	0.6
Denmark	604,750	608,888	0.5	0.5
Singapore	606,795	592,488	0.5	0.5
Turkey	642,223	516,347	0.6	0.4
Portugal	406,936	424,387	0.4	0.4
Rest of World	9,227,509	8,898,822	8.2	7.6
Total	112,407,340	117,607,889	100.0	100.0

Exports Data

122. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the amount in euro in value of services only exported from Irish-based firms to each country worldwide in 2015 and 2016, in tabular form; and the percentage share of such exports to each country in this period as a proportion of the total share. [26412/17]

The Taoiseach: The official measure of Ireland's service exports are produced by the Central Statistics Office in the annual International Trade in Services publication. The latest available data with a breakdown of service export destination by country is for the year 2015.

Exports of Services 2015 ¹

		2015
Country/Region	€million	% Share
Algeria	*	*
Andorra	0	0.00
Angola	*	*
Antarctica	0	0.00
Argentina	170	0.14
Australia	2,627	2.16
Austria	766	0.63
Bahamas	27	0.02
Bahrain	47	0.04
Barbados	84	0.07
Belarus	*	*
Belgium	2,363	1.94
Bermuda	198	0.16
Bosnia and Herzegovina	*	*
Brazil	919	0.76
British Virgin Islands	53	0.04
Bulgaria	90	0.07
Canada	1,416	1.16
Cayman Islands	414	0.34
Chile	221	0.18
China	3,377	2.78
Colombia	174	0.14
Croatia	81	0.07
Curacao	*	*
Cyprus	*	*
Czech Republic	309	0.25
Denmark	1,148	0.94
Dominican Republic	4	0.00
Ecuador	23	0.02
Egypt	228	0.19
El Salvador	20	0.02
Estonia	15	0.01
Ethiopia	65	0.05
Finland	886	0.73
France	5,933	4.88
Georgia	*	*
Germany	9,569	7.87
Gibraltar	89	0.07
Greece	318	0.26
Guernsey	47	0.04
Hong Kong	562	0.46
Hungary	*	*
Iceland	73	0.06
India	2,337	1.92
Indonesia	301	0.25
Isle of Man	106	0.09
Israel	1,637	1.35

Questions - Written Answers

		2015
Country/Region	€million	% Share
Italy	6,242	5.13
Jamaica	4	0.00
Japan	3,155	2.59
Jersey	9	0.01
Jordan	54	0.04
Kazakhstan	90	0.07
Kenya	98	0.08
Korea, Republic of (South Korea)	630	0.52
Kuwait	74	0.06
Latvia	53	0.04
Lebanon	48	0.04
Libya	*	*
Liechtenstein	*	*
Lithuania	69	0.06
Luxembourg	1,477	1.21
Macao	*	*
Malaysia	244	0.20
Malta	107	0.09
Marshall Islands	*	*
Mexico	547	0.45
Montenegro	14	0.01
Morocco	69	0.06
Netherlands	4,009	3.30
New Zealand	223	0.18
Nigeria	139	0.11
Norway	1,230	1.01
Oman	73	0.06
Pakistan	94	0.08
Panama	48	0.04
Philippines	169	0.14
Poland	880	0.72
Portugal	789	0.65
Qatar	262	0.22
Romania	137	0.11
Russian Federation	1,326	1.09
Rwanda	*	*
Saudi Arabia	622	0.51
Serbia	46	0.04
Singapore	1,208	0.99
Slovakia	98	0.08
Slovenia	55	0.05
South Africa	944	0.78
Spain	3,081	2.53
Sri Lanka	*	*
Sweden	2,299	1.89
Switzerland	3,167	2.60
Taiwan, Province of China	490	0.40

		2015
Country/Region	€million	% Share
Thailand	118	0.10
Tokelau	0	0.00
Trinidad and Tobago	*	*
Tunisia	26	0.02
Turkey	663	0.55
Ukraine	45	0.04
United Arab Emirates	1,025	0.84
United Kingdom	23,535	19.35
United States	12,174	10.01
Uruguay	*	*
Venezuela	22	0.02
Viet Nam	169	0.14
Virgin Islands, US	8	0.01
International Organisations	*	*
Not geographically allocated 2	*	*
Marginal trade 3	269	0.22
World total	121,605	

¹ From International Trade in Service Publication. Table 3

² This category covers data supplied by respondents without a geographical breakdown.

³ Subtotal for countries for which exports and imports are less than €10m.

*Suppressed for confidentiality reasons but included in world total.

Exports Data

123. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the number of small and medium enterprises, SMEs, that account for total exports of goods and services on a percentage basis broken down by each country worldwide in 2015 and 2016; and the number of persons employed in such SMEs. [26413/17]

The Taoiseach: The exact data requested by the Deputy is not available but some estimates can be made from the CSO's Structural Business Statistics (SBS) surveys. The most recent estimates available from the SBS surveys are for reference year 2014. The annual Census of Industrial Production, which is a component of SBS, is based on survey returns from a sample of about 2,000 industrial enterprises, combined with estimates for other enterprises based on Revenue data. Similarly, the Annual Services Inquiry is based on survey returns from a sample of about 8,000 service enterprises and combines this with Revenue data to give the overall estimates.

The sample returns from each of these two surveys give an indication of whether the enterprise is involved in exporting goods or services. The export estimates relate only to industrial enterprises employing 3 or more persons and to services enterprises employing 20 or more persons. The following two tables show the number of SMEs in Ireland above those size thresholds in 2014 and the estimated percentage engaged in exporting goods or services.

Table 1: Numbers of SMEs in Industry and Services, 2014

-	Total
Industrial SMEs with between 3 and 249 persons employed	5,164
Service SMEs with between 20 and 249 persons employed	6,368

Table 2: Estimated percentage of SMEs in Industry and Services engaged in exporting (based on respondent sample returns), 2014

-	Total
Industrial SMEs with between 3 and 249 persons employed	51.2%
Service SMEs with between 20 and 249 persons employed	27.4%

Some information on the destination of exports is collected in the Census of Industrial Production, but not in the Annual Services Inquiry. This information indicates that an estimated 49% of exports by industrial SMEs as measured by the Census of Industrial Production (comprises predominantly goods data with some Industrial services data) are to the UK, 29% to the Eurozone, 7% to the rest of the EU, 7% to the USA and 8% to the rest of the world.

More detailed information on enterprises engaged in exporting goods or services can be compiled from the Trade by Enterprise Characteristics (TEC) and Service Trade by Enterprise Characteristics (STEC) datasets. These datasets are derived from the relevant goods and service export statistics. The CSO plans to publish the statistics based on the TEC dataset by the end of 2017.

Unemployment Data

124. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the number of long-term unemployed over one year duration based on latest data; if he will provide in percentage terms the number of long-term unemployed over one year duration out of total persons unemployed; and the corresponding EU average rate. [26425/17]

The Taoiseach: The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest unemployment data available for Ireland are for Q1 2017.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for Q4 2016.

The table below shows, for Ireland, the total number of unemployed persons (one year and over) together with the total number of unemployed persons for Q4 2016 and Q1 2017.

The table also includes the percentage share of all unemployed persons represented by those who are unemployed for one year and over for the same periods for Ireland, along with the corresponding percentage share for the EU 28 in respect of Q4 2016.

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years classified by long-term (one year and over) unemployment (ILO) Q4 16 and Q1 17

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years	Q4 16	Q1 17
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons - Ireland ('000)	79.7	78.7
Total unemployed persons - Ireland ('000)	147.4	146.2
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons as a percentage of total unemployed persons - Ireland (%)	54.1	53.8
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons as a percentage of total unemployed persons - EU 28 (%)	46.6	:

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland and Eurostat.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q4=Oct-Dec, Q1=Jan-Mar.

: Not available at time of issue.

Unemployment Data

125. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the number of long-term unemployed, over one year duration, persons aged 15 to 24 years of age based on latest data; if he will provide in percentage terms the number of long term unemployed over one year duration out of total persons unemployed in this cohort; and the corresponding EU average rate. [26426/17]

The Taoiseach: The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest unemployment data available for Ireland are for Q1 2017.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for Q4 2016.

The table below shows the total number of unemployed (ILO) persons (one year and over) aged 15-24 years for Ireland together with the total number who are unemployed for this age group in Q4 2016 and Q1 2017.

The table also includes the percentage share of all unemployed persons in this age category who are unemployed for one year and over for the same periods, along with the corresponding percentage share for the EU 28 in respect of Q4 2016.

Unemployed (ILO) persons aged 15-24 years classified by long-term (one year and over) unemployment, Q4 16 and Q1 17

Unemployed (ILO) persons aged 15-24 years	Q4 16	Q1 17
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons aged 15-24 years- Ireland ('000)	10.7	9.3
Total unemployed persons aged 15-24 years - Ireland ('000)	30.4	24.3
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons aged 15-24 years as		
a percentage of total unemployed persons aged 15-24 years - Ireland (%)	35.2	38.3
Long-term (one year and over) unemployed persons aged 15-24 years as		
a percentage of total unemployed persons aged 15-24 years - EU 28 (%)	29.3	:

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland and Eurostat.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q4=Oct-Dec, Q1=Jan-Mar.

Not available at time of issue.

Unemployment Data

126. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the number of young persons in the State aged 15 to 29 years of age classified as not in employment, education or training, NEETs; the percentage of NEETs as a proportion of the total unemployed here; and the corresponding EU average rate. [26432/17]

The Taoiseach: The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest annual (average) unemployment data available for Ireland is for 2016.

The table below shows, for Ireland, the number of persons between 15-29 years of age classified as, not in employment, education, or training (NEET) and the total number of those classified as NEET being unemployed (ILO) for the years 2015 and 2016. The table also includes for Ireland the percentage share of all unemployed persons aged between 15 and 29 years represented by those classified as NEET above.

The most recently available annual unemployment data for the EU28 is for 2015.

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 29 years classified as NEET, 2015 and 2016

Unemployed (ILO) persons aged 15 - 29 years	2015	2016
Total number of persons aged 15-29 years classified as NEET - Ireland ('000) ¹	135.6	121.3
of which: NEET (unemployed) - Ireland ('000)	59.4	48.1
Total number unemployed persons aged 15-29 years - Ireland ('000)	68.5	58.7
Percentage share of total unemployed persons aged 15-29 years represented by those classified as NEET for the same age group - Ireland	86.7%	81.9%
Percentage share of total unemployed persons aged 15-29 years represented by those classified as NEET for the same age group - EU28	75.9%	:

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland and Eurostat.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

1 Includes persons who are unemployed and active.

: Not available at time of issue.

Unemployment Data

127. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the number of long-term unemployed over two years duration based on latest data; if he will provide in percentage terms, the number of long term unemployed over two years duration out of total persons unemployed; and the corresponding EU average rate. [26427/17]

The Taoiseach: The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of unemployment (International Labour Organisation - ILO) in the State. The latest unemployment data available for Ireland are for Q1 2017.

The latest corresponding EU 28 data available are for Q4 2016.

The table below shows the total number of long term unemployed over two years duration together with the total number of persons who were unemployed in Q4 2016 and Q1 2017 for Ireland.

The table also includes the percentage share of all unemployed persons represented by this category for the same periods for Ireland, along with the corresponding percentage share for the EU 28 in respect of Q4 2016.

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years classified by long-term (two years and over) unemployment (ILO) Q4 16 and Q1 17

Unemployed persons aged 15 - 74 years	Q4 16	Q1 17
Long-term (two years and over) unemployed persons - Ireland ('000)	56.5	55.2
Total unemployed persons - Ireland ('000)	147.4	146.2
Long-term (two years and over) unemployed persons as a percentage of total unemployed persons - Ireland (%)	38.3	37.8
Long-term (two years and over) unemployed persons as a percentage of total unemployed persons - EU 28 (%)	29.2	:

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland and Eurostat.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q4=Oct-Dec, Q1=Jan-Mar.

: Not available at time of issue.

Unemployment Data

128. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the number and proportion of jobless households in the State on a percentage basis; and the corresponding EU number and average rate. [26428/17]

The Taoiseach: The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of data for the jobless household indicator. The latest QNHS annual data available for Ireland is for the year 2016.

The table below shows the proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households in 2015 and 2016 (averages) for Ireland and the corresponding EU 28 data for 2015 and 2016.

Proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households, 2015 and 2016

%

Proportion of persons aged 18-59 years in jobless households	2015	2016
Ireland	12.4	11.6
EU 28	10.6	10.1

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland

and Eurostat.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Unemployment Data

129. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Taoiseach the number of jobless households by county, in tabular form. [26857/17]

The Taoiseach: The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of data for the jobless household indicator.

The indicator “People aged 18 - 59 years living in jobless households” is calculated as the share of persons aged 18 - 59 who are living in households where no one is in employment. Students aged 18 - 24 who live in households composed solely of students (persons who have indicated that their Principal Economic Status is Student) of the same age class are not included. The indicator “People aged 0 - 17 years living in jobless households” is calculated as the share of persons aged 0 - 17 who are living in households where no one is in employment.

Estimates for the jobless household indicator are produced by NUTS 3 Regions and are not available on a county basis.

The table below shows the proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households classified by sex, age group and NUTS3 region in Q1 2017.

Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households classified by sex, age group and NUTS3 region, Q1 2017

%

NUTS3 regions	Q1 2017
Border	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	13.7
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	14.3
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	14.3
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	14.3
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	14.1
Midland	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	12.7
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	11.8

Questions - Written Answers

NUTS3 regions	Q1 2017
Border	
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	14.1
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	13.0
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	12.9
West	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	14.2
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	8.4
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	11.0
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	9.7
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	11.2
Dublin	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	13.1
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	8.1
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.7
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	8.9
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	10.1
Mid-East	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	8.0
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	5.7
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	8.8
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	7.3
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	7.6
Mid-West	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	12.5
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	10.6

NUTS3 regions	Q1 2017
Border	
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	11.7
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	11.1
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	11.6
South-East	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	12.8
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	12.3
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	12.5
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	12.4
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	12.5
South-West	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	11.1
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.4
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	11.5
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	10.4
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	10.6
State	
Proportion of persons aged 0-17 living in jobless household	12.2
Proportion of male persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	9.5
Proportion of female persons aged 18-59 living in jobless household	11.1
Proportion of persons aged 18-59 living in jobless households	10.3
Proportion of all persons aged 0-59 living in jobless households	10.9

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS), Central Statistics Office, Ireland.

Data may be subject to future revision.

Data may be subject to sampling or other survey errors, which are greater in respect of smaller values or estimates of change.

Reference period: Q1=January-March.

Brexit Negotiations

130. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations. [26910/17]

The Taoiseach: On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges.

These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of former Taoiseach Kenny's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

In my Department an amalgamated International, EU and Northern Ireland Division was set up to ensure that Brexit is treated as a crucial cross-cutting issue. All Departments and Agencies have been charged with making Brexit a priority. There is strong co-ordination at key levels across all Government Departments, including through the Cabinet Committee system.

In addition, a team of experienced senior officials from key Departments, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and my own Department, is preparing for the complex negotiations. Furthermore, each Government Department has developed thorough analysis of the critical issues which need to be addressed in their sectors. Consultation and engagement with a range of stakeholders has been extensive and is ongoing.

The structures and arrangements in place are appropriate to the nature of the tasks to be managed in the context of the challenges arising from Brexit, including the risks associated with the possibility of no deal being agreed in the negotiation process.

Public Sector Pensions Data

131. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26979/17]

The Taoiseach: Pension contributions for the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Secretariat between 2010-2017 are as follows:

#	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Pension Contributions (S&C)	€9,606	€9,382	€9,717	€9,249	€12,792	€12,219	€12,875	€6,243
Pension Levy (PRD)	€98,416	€97,859	€101,390	€92,389	€88,158	€81,960	€73,131	€34,011

Central Statistics Office Data

132. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Taoiseach the Ministers or officials that have pre-release access to official statistics in tabular form; the official statistics to which each Minister has pre-release access; and the length of time before official release they have access. [27041/17]

The Taoiseach: The CSO's Policy on Pre-Release Access is published at <http://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/dissemination/csopolicyonpre-releaseaccess/>.

The policy specifies that the CSO's standard practice is that statistics are released to all users at the same time and any form of pre-release access is a privilege. No ministers are given pre-release access by the CSO. The list of persons with pre-release access privileges is published at <http://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/dissemination/csopolicyonpre-releaseaccess/listofindividuals-whohavebeenapprovedforpre-releaseaccess/>

Disability Act Employment Targets

133. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; and the dates and details of such competitions. [27144/17]

The Taoiseach: The Disability Act, 2005, obliges all public sector organisations, including my Department and the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), to employ a minimum of 3% of staff with a disability.

As at 31 December 2016, 4.59% of the staff of my Department and 5.5% of the staff of NESDO voluntarily disclosed a disability.

My Department is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all staff. Staff are recruited on the basis that they meet the requirements of the positions they are to fill. In addition to complying with the provisions of the Disability Act, 2005, we follow the guidelines set out in the Commission for Public Service Appointments' codes of practice for appointments to positions in the Civil Service and Public Service.

Recruitment to my Department is, in the main, undertaken through the Public Appointments Service. My Department also participates in positive action programmes such as the Willing, Able and Mentoring Programme under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Departmental Contracts

134. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; and the basis for each contract. [27457/17]

The Taoiseach: There have been no contracts awarded to this company by my Department or the body under its aegis, the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), in the period in question.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

135. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach if State agencies, including the CSO and Pobal, pay intellectual property fees for the use of the deprivation index (details supplied); the cost per annum of same; and the justification for this in view of the reliance of the index on publicly collected data. [27701/17]

The Taoiseach: The Pobal HP Deprivation Index is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from the census.

The index is freely available to all on the Pobal website. It can be accessed as an excel download for Electoral Divisions or through the map interface which presents deprivation scores for Small Areas. Users can also run reports for Local Authority areas which provide a list of the Small Areas within that Local Authority area along with the accompanying deprivation scores and census data.

The full index at Small Area level in excel format is also freely available to all public sector bodies, including the CSO, directly from Trutz Haase.

The census data used to create the index is based on the CSO's small area population dataset which is also freely available on the CSO website. The 2016 census small area data will be available on the 20 of July 2016.

Departmental Expenditure

136. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27716/17]

The Taoiseach: There have been no contracts awarded to this company by my Department or the body under its aegis, the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO).

Employment Data

137. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons employed in the film and television production industry; and the number of these which are categorised as trainees. [27801/17]

The Taoiseach: The exact information requested by the Deputy is not available.

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of estimates of employment in the State. In line with EU requirements the QNHS collects sector of employment according to the standard EU classification (NACE Rev.2).

The two digit NACE Rev. 2 classification of employment is the most detailed employment data available from the QNHS.

The two digit NACE Rev. 2 Code 59 (Motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities) includes data on employment in the film and television production industry.

The QNHS estimate of employment in the two digit NACE Rev. 2 Code 59 (Motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities) in Q1 2017 was 6,600 persons. It is not possible to provide details of the number of trainees included in this two digit NACE Rev. 2 employment classification for reasons of statistical reliability.

Appointments to State Boards

138. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the public appointments service; and if so, the names and positions of same. [28220/17]

The Taoiseach: No former TDs have been appointed to State Boards under my Department's remit following recommendations by the Public Appointments Service.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

139. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has met the church leaders recently. [27555/17]

The Taoiseach: Like public representatives generally, my predecessor met church leaders informally from time to time in the course of attending official or public events. Last year in particular, with the 1916 commemorations, he attended many events that were also attended by representatives from various religious groups.

Bilateral meetings have been held with representatives from the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, the Jewish community, the Islamic community, Atheist Ireland and the Humanist Association of Ireland as part of the Structured Dialogue Process between 2013 and 2015. A meeting was also held with an ecumenical delegation of European Churches in the context of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2013.

My predecessor reported to the House on all the meetings held under the Structured Dialogue Process in replies to various Parliamentary Questions since 2013, most recently on 15 June 2016 and 28 March 2017. No meetings have been held under the Structured Dialogue Process since the General Election.

Postal Codes

140. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach the amount spent by his Department on

designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28146/17]

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach does not have policy responsibility for the design, implementation or support of the Eircode system. As answered in previous Parliamentary Questions, there has been no expenditure by the Department relating to the Eircode. Including the Eircode in the Department's stationery did not result in additional cost.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

141. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, since the British general election outcome on 8 June 2017. [28651/17]

The Taoiseach: I spoke by phone to Prime Minister May last Thursday following my appointment as Taoiseach. I extended the Government's sympathies to her and to the people of London on the tragic fire at the Grenfell Tower. We also discussed Brexit and the ongoing political discussions in London and in Belfast, agreeing on the need to have the Northern Ireland Executive up and running as quickly as possible. We agreed to meet in Downing Street the following Monday to continue our discussions.

In that meeting yesterday I again expressed my sympathies on the recent tragedies and atrocities in London. We discussed the situation in Northern Ireland in some detail. We are both absolutely committed to seeing the Northern Ireland institutions back up and running as a matter of urgency.

We discussed our respective contacts with the parties in recent days. I am confident that, in our role as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, we can provide resolute support and encouragement to the Northern Ireland parties in the days ahead, and that with goodwill and respect on all sides we can reach a successful conclusion to the current talks.

Now that formal negotiations between the EU and the UK have commenced, it is vital that the views and concerns of Northern Ireland are fully reflected.

The Prime Minister and I reaffirmed our two Governments' commitment to maintaining the Common Travel Area and associated reciprocal rights, to protecting the Peace Process and, in particular, to keeping the border invisible. But we also recognise that this will be extremely challenging and, in the words of the EU negotiation guidelines, will require "flexible and imaginative" solutions. This Government will certainly play its part in working constructively with all our partners – in Northern Ireland, in Britain and across the EU – to find solutions that are in the best interests of everyone on these islands.

I also raised the ongoing talks between the DUP and the Conservative Party in the context of the need for impartiality of the two Governments.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

142. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to the Northern Ireland First Minister, Arlene Foster, since the outcome of the British general election on 8 June 2017; the issues that were discussed; and if particular issues regarding Brexit were discussed. [28652/17]

143. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to the Northern Ireland

First Minister, Arlene Foster, regarding the confidence and supply arrangement between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Conservative Party. [28653/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 142 and 143 together.

I met with DUP Party Leader Arlene Foster and Simon Hamilton MLA in Government Buildings on 16 June.

We discussed a wide range of issues including the urgent need to re-establish the Northern Ireland Executive, noting the deadline of 29 June for completion of negotiations.

There was also agreement on the importance of a functioning Executive in the context of the Brexit negotiations due to start the following week.

I made clear that my Government and I would work in support of the Northern Ireland parties to re-establish the Executive, and in pursuit of strong North-South relations including through the North South Ministerial Council.

I stressed the objectives of ensuring that Brexit does not impact negatively on the Good Friday Agreement and the Peace Process, and protecting North-South trade and economic activity and the Common Travel Area.

I raised the ongoing discussions on formation of a new Government in London with the DUP, which is a matter for the parties represented at Westminster, but noted the need to avoid any outcome which could interfere with devolution and the prospects of re-establishing the Executive.

Finally, I noted opportunities for investment in infrastructure which could be of benefit on both parts of the island, and agreed that discussions on this should continue.

Government Information Service

144. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his plans to make changes to the Government Information Service; the number of staff employed there; and if there will be an increase in same. [28654/17]

The Taoiseach: The Government Information Service is comprised of:

- Government Press Secretary;
- Deputy Government Press Secretary;
- Assistant Government Press Secretary (Vacant);
- Two Assistant Principal Officers, one of whom is assigned to MerrionStreet.ie;
- Four Press Officers (Higher Executive Officer equivalent) - there are currently vacancies in two of these positions;
- Three Communications & Media Assistants (Executive Officer equivalent; two of whom are assigned to MerrionStreet.ie) - there are currently vacancies in all three of these positions; and
- 1 Clerical Officer.

Temporary arrangements are in place to cover over the vacancies detailed above while the

relevant recruitment processes are finalised.

I have not as yet made any decisions as to whether to make changes to the resourcing or structure of the Government Information Service.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

145. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28676/17]

The Taoiseach: The National Economic and Social Council is the only relevant body insofar as my Department is concerned.

NESC's role is to analyse and report on strategic issues for Ireland's economic, social, environmental and sustainable development. Its tax obligations arise in relation to payroll and, as relevant, professional services withholding tax. All payments and accounting practices are audited annually by the C&AG and detailed in the Council's Annual Report and Financial Statements.

The most recent Annual Report and Financial Statement, for 2015, was published in December 2016, and includes the Chairman's Statement confirming that the NESC's policies and procedures comply with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Compliance with the Code of Practice is reviewed on a regular basis and will be again in the context of the preparations for the 2016 report and financial statements.

Supports to former Taoisigh

146. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the supports being afforded to the previous holder of his office; the annualised cost of these supports; and the period of time for which these supports will be given. [28997/17]

The Taoiseach: The Department of Finance initiative that allowed for the provision of supports to former Taoisigh ceased in March 2012. My Department has not provided any support to former Taoisigh since that date.

Departmental Staff Relocation

147. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff under the remit of his Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29045/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department fully supports staff mobility and routinely circulates secondment/transfer opportunities to all Departmental staff, including those opportunities issued by the Civil Service HR Directorate in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. If

a staff member is interested in availing of a mobility opportunity, my Department makes every effort to facilitate same. In general, no costs arise for my Department when an individual staff member avails of a mobility opportunity.

HEADING

148. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach the status of the Commission of Investigation into NAMA's Project Eagle. [29051/17]

The Taoiseach: Following the approval of the draft Order by the Dáil and Seanad, the Government made the Commission of Investigation (National Asset Management Agency) Order 2017 on 13 June 2017. The Commission will, in the first module of its work, investigate the sale by the National Assets Management Agency of its Project Eagle portfolio. Judge John Cooke has been appointed as the Commission's Sole Member. The Commission is fully independent in all aspects of its work. The Commission's address is: Commission of Investigation (National Asset Management Agency), First Floor, St. Stephen's Green House, Dublin 2.

Departmental Staff Data

149. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff employed in her Department and in each State agency under the aegis of her Department, by county, in tabular form. [29254/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has its head office located in Dublin, with certain offices based in regional locations. There are also a number of State Agencies that come within the remit of my Department, some of whom have a regional presence. The current functions and locations, together with the respective staffing complement for each is set out in the tables.

Please note that a transfer of certain functions relating to labour affairs to the Department of Employment and Social Protection is currently being progressed. The figures provided below relate to the Department and its Offices before the transfer of functions.

Staffing (headcount) numbers of the Department and its Offices

Department/Office	County	Staff Numbers (headcount)
Department	Dublin *	465
Companies Registration Office (CRO)	Dublin	84
	Carlow	44
Patents Office	Kilkenny	46
Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE)	Dublin	35
Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)	Dublin	85
	Carlow	61
	Cork	7
	Clare (Shannon)	10

Questions - Written Answers

Department/Office	County	Staff Numbers (headcount)
	Sligo	10
Labour Court	Dublin	28

*Includes 4 staff seconded to Geneva and 1 to Brussels counted in DJEI staffing figures

Staffing (headcount) numbers of the Agencies

Agency	County	Staff Numbers (headcount)
Competition and Consumer Protection Commission	Dublin	89
Enterprise Ireland	Dublin	412
	Clare	48
	Cork	19
	Galway	16
	Westmeath	12
	Louth	5
	Sligo	5
	Kerry	3
	Waterford	3
	Donegal	2
Health and Safety Authority	Dublin	96
	Cork	21
	Kilkenny	12
	Westmeath	12
	Limerick	10
	Waterford	8
	Galway	7
Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority	Sligo	6
	Kildare	22
IDA Ireland	Dublin	158
	Westmeath	40
	Sligo	9
	Cork	6
	Limerick	6
	Waterford	6
	Galway	4
	Donegal	2
	Louth	2
	Cavan	1
National Standards Authority of Ireland	Dublin	111
	Limerick	9
	Galway	7
	Cork	4
	Sligo	3

Agency	County	Staff Numbers (headcount)
	Waterford	1
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	Dublin	80
Science Foundation Ireland	Dublin	52

Departmental Agencies Staff Recruitment

150. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has satisfied herself with the rate of recruitment of State agency staff for Brexit related issues; the reason less than one third of Brexit specific posts have been filled in Enterprise Ireland; if barriers have been identified to the recruitment of persons in State agencies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26557/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, an additional €3 million was secured in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 and is being targeted specifically to assist in our response to the evolving Brexit scenario. It is enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies recruit some 40 to 50 additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers. These numbers may grow as Agencies allocate additional Own Resource Income, by agreement with the Department, to recruit further staff to work on “Brexit-related” activity.

The additional €3m has been allocated across

- Enterprise Ireland (€1,700,000)
- IDA Ireland (€750,000)
- Science Foundation Ireland (€150,000)
- The Health and Safety Authority (€150,000), and
- The Department itself (€250,000).

In relation to the rate of recruitment of staff for Brexit related issues within the State Agencies listed above, the current position is set out for each below. The remaining Agencies that come under the remit of my Department – the National Standards Authority of Ireland, The Personal Injuries Assessment Board, The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and The Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority – are not at this time recruiting any additional staff specifically for Brexit related issues.

In relation to Enterprise Ireland, 12 posts have been filled to date and a further 19 have been advertised with the recruitment process ongoing. The remaining 8 job specifications are being finalised with a view to advertising them in the immediate future. Enterprise Ireland are confident that they have partnered with the most appropriate recruitment agencies around the world and in Ireland, and consider that this will support them in the identification of high calibre candidates, increasing the speed of filling the outstanding posts.

Insofar as IDA Ireland is concerned, three Brexit related posts have been filled to date and the recruitment process for the remaining seven is ongoing. IDA Ireland has undertaken a rigorous recruitment process across a wide variety of channels to ensure that the best candidates are identified for these roles, and the Agency will make the remaining Brexit appointments at the earliest possible opportunity.

Additionally, IDA Ireland has sought a further 21 staff resources in order that it can meet the jobs and investment targets set out in its Strategy – “Winning Foreign Direct Investment 2015 – 2019” - and to meet the global challenges of 2017 and beyond, with Brexit key among the identified challenges. My Department is pursuing this matter separately.

In respect of Science Foundation Ireland, the recruitment process to fill three Brexit related posts is currently underway and successful candidates are expected to be in place in the coming months. Furthermore, a number of current SFI staff also have Brexit related responsibilities. SFI has an internal Brexit team led by one of its Senior Directors which focuses on Brexit related initiatives including, for example, direct engagement with UK colleagues in exploring and drafting potential joint schemes with the UK.

The Health and Safety Authority’s recruitment planning is currently underway and the HSA hopes to be in a position to commence the process of recruitment in July for two Brexit related posts.

I am, of course, eager to see the remaining additional resources recruited as quickly as possible. However, it should be borne in mind that recruitment is being undertaken by the Agencies within a highly competitive labour market and in this context I am satisfied that appropriate efforts are currently being made by the Agencies to recruit these additional resources.

It must also be borne in mind that all these Agencies will have prioritised the Brexit implications arising for them in their individual work plans for 2017 and beyond, which serving staff will contribute to as part of their day-to-day work.

Brexit Negotiations

151. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the estimated impact of a no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations on the auto part industry here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26558/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government through the Action Plan for Jobs has taken decisive action to support all sectors of the economy recover from the deepest recession we have experienced in recent decades. This sustained focus on job creation has resulted in the creation of over 209,000 additional jobs since 2012. The unemployment rate has declined from over 15% in 2012 to 6.4% in May this year.

The motor industry was impacted during the recession in the same way as all other sectors. The sector has recovered substantially over the last five years. New vehicle registrations reached their highest level since 2009 last year. While the data for the first four months of 2017 indicate a decline of over 9% compared with the same period last year, registrations remain above the levels in 2015 and immediately preceding years. CSO data is also indicating an increase in imported vehicles being registered, in part reflecting the weakening of sterling and consumers seeking value for money.

The outlook for consumer spend remains positive. According to data provided by the Department of Finance, personal consumption expenditure is growing, headline retail sales are up, and the total number of private cars has increased over the year. Overall, consumer spending, employment trends, and taxation receipts confirm that Ireland’s economic fundamentals remain solid. In terms of external demand, the UK, Euro-area, and US economies are expanding. This positive outlook should continue to benefit the motor sector and auto-part industry in their recovery to a sustainable level.

In addition, my Department is undertaking extensive preparatory work and consultations to anticipate the impact of Brexit on key sectors, including the retail sector. As Chair of the Brexit response in my Department, I will continue to ensure we address the challenges and opportunities arising from Brexit.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

152. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the actions to be taken as a result of the outputs from a series of structured engagements with companies across the regions of different sizes and sectors on the impact of currency fluctuations on exposed companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26559/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): A recent survey of SMEs commissioned by my Department on Brexit impacts, and published on my Department's website, indicated that 49% of companies had experienced no impact on their business from Brexit, and a further 15% had experienced minimal impact. However, when asked to look forward over the next 18 months the percentage expecting no Brexit impact drops to 26%, with 17% expecting a significant impact.

Based on this analysis, other research carried out on behalf of my Department over the past months, and extensive engagement with stakeholders, my Department is working closely with Enterprise Ireland, the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, and the SBCI to develop targeted supports dealing with identified needs of companies around working capital and business development.

My Department and its agencies are actively supporting companies in preparing for Brexit on an ongoing basis. Enterprise Ireland's (EI) #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign featuring the 'Brexit SME Scorecard' was launched in March. The Scorecard is an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit.

EI has introduced a 'Be Prepared Grant' which offers up to €5,000 for exporting client companies to conduct further research and use external expertise to develop a Brexit Action Plan. EI is also delivering various supports to reduce supply-chain costs and drive efficiencies as a means of improving operating margins, thereby increasing competitiveness.

The Local Enterprise Office Brexit-focused supports include the roll out of a national Lean for Micro initiative to improve competitiveness; mentoring and training initiatives; and awareness raising including workshops and cross-border business networking.

InterTrade Ireland is also undertaking a range of initiatives for SMEs trading across the border including the provision of advice and supports for capability building.

Enterprise Europe Network

153. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have contacted the Enterprise Europe Network in 2017. [26560/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The European Commission launched the Enterprise Europe Network in 2008. It is a project co-funded under the "COSME" - an EU funding programme designed to encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises.

The Enterprise Europe Network in Ireland is a 4-partner consortium consisting of Enterprise Ireland (as the coordinator) along with Dublin Chamber of Commerce, Cork Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Offices. It helps business innovate and grow through tailored support, new business and technology partnerships, commercial opportunities, licensing deals, and partners searches for EU funded R&D. Its services are tailored to SMEs but also available to all other businesses, universities and research centres. It provides free services including; identifying international partnerships, advice for international growth and support for business innovation.

The number of businesses that have contacted Enterprise Ireland EEN to date in 2017 is 83. Figures in respect of the Local Enterprise Offices are not available until the end of 2017. However, 1,396 SMEs/clients received individual advisory support from the LEOs in 2016.

My Department does not have the required data for the other members of the EEN in Ireland, i.e. Dublin Chamber of Commerce and the Cork Chamber of Commerce.

The EEN is active in over 60 countries and brings together 3,000 experts from more than 600 member organisations including innovation support organisations, universities and research institutes, regional development organisations and chambers of commerce and industry, throughout the world. It's the biggest SME support network and combines international business expertise with local knowledge to help companies move into new markets.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

154. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the agency which is responsible for the regulation of television contracts with persons; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that television companies making it difficult for persons to disengage from their contracts despite the contract term having expired; and if she will investigate this matter in order to determine whether action could be taken to ensure that television companies are not deliberately blocking persons from moving to another supplier when their initial contract period is up. [26617/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutorily independent body with primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with consumer protection legislation. The issues around contractual terms and termination policies raised by the Deputy come within the CCPC's remit. The main consumer protection enactments relevant to these issues are the European Communities (Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts) Regulations 1995 (S.I. No. 27 of 1995) and the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 2007 on unfair, misleading and aggressive commercial practices.

The CCPC has advised me that it is aware, through its Consumer Helpline, of concerns about trader behaviour and policies in respect of the termination of contracts with television service providers. While it is not the role of the CCPC to pursue individual cases, the contacts it receives from consumers are a key source of market intelligence which help to inform and prioritise its enforcement activities. While the volume of contacts received in relation to termination of television contracts has not necessitated enforcement action at this point, the CCPC will continue to keep the issue under review. In addition to welcoming contacts from consumers on the issue it would be happy to receive information from the Deputy.

As part of its information role, the CCPC (and its predecessor the National Consumer Agency) has consistently advocated that consumers should shop around when considering sign-

ing up for a service. Where consumers encounter difficulties in switching service providers, the CCPC's helpline and website provide extensive information to assist consumers in fully asserting their rights.

The Deputy may also wish to note that, to the extent that television services providers provide electronic communications services, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) could have a role in respect of the issues highlighted in his question. ComReg has dual enforcement powers with the CCPC in respect of certain consumer protection legislation, including the legislation governing unfair contract terms. As the telecommunications sectoral regulator it also has a role in tackling operator conduct that hinders or prevents switching. There is a Cooperation Agreement in place between the CCPC and ComReg that permits the two bodies to consult and agree on the most appropriate ways of resolving issues of mutual concern in the electronic communications services sector.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Funding

155. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the budget allocated to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2006 to 2016, in tabular form; the actual expenditure by the office for each of these years; and the whole time equivalent staffing at the end of each year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26631/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The financial and staffing information being sought by the Deputy in relation to the Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement is set out in the table.

	Pay allocation	Pay expenditure at year end	Non-Pay allocation	Non-Pay expenditure at year end	Full-time Equivalent Staff serving	Headcount
2006	€1.899m	€1.915m	€2.814m	€1.440m	30.3	32
2007	€2.119m	€2.140m	€2.704m	€2.215m	32.9	35
2008	€2.681m	€2.412m	€2.276m	€1.912m	36.5	41
2009	€2.655m	€2.664m	€2.880m	€2.941m	40.6	44
2010	€2.579m	€2.625m	€3.507m	€1.074m	39.7	43
2011	€2.660m	€2.629m	€3.307m	€0.768m	39.7	42
2012	€2.620m	€2.463m	€3.077m	€0.973m	35.1	38
2013	€2.475m	€2.394m	€2.855m	€0.729m	34.5	37
2014	€2.465m	€2.216m	€2.207m	€0.797m	32.5	35
2015	€2.884m	€2.156m	€2.207m	€0.917m	30.5	33
2016	€2.808m	€2.006m	€2.207m	€0.721m	32.7	35

It should be noted that there were 27 fortnightly payroll periods in 2015 applicable to the bulk of ODCE staff and a return to the norm of 26 fortnightly payroll periods in 2016, hence the modest reduction in the 2016 Pay allocation.

In addition there is a staff complement of 7 Gardai assigned to the ODCE to assist with its criminal investigation / prosecution functions. Additional Garda resources were assigned to the Office in the period 2010-2013 to assist in the Anglo Irish Bank investigation. The pay related costs for the Gardai assigned to the ODCE are borne by the Department of Justice and Equality Vote and such pay costs are not reflected in the financial table above.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Gar-dai	8	8	7	7	10	10	10	8	7	6	5

Although the staffing complement of the ODCE formed part of the overall Department cohort, during the lifetime of the moratorium great care was taken in terms of the staffing impacts of the general Departmental down-sizing on the Office. In that regard, the Office was provided with sufficient pay monies to meet their pay needs as is evidenced from the pay underspends over recent years. In general, the ODCE only had a reduction in staff where staff retired or transferred from the Office and there were delays in filling the resultant vacancies in professional areas such as Legal and/or Accounting.

Specific provision was made in the Office's 2015 allocation to allow for the recruitment of additional staff, including additional specialist staff such as the 7 forensic accountants. The reality, however, has been that notwithstanding the increased pay allocation, it has taken some time to effect the recruitment of the specialist staff concerned. Nonetheless, 5 additional forensic accountants are now in place and a competition to recruit a further 2 is underway under the auspices of the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Likewise, the Department and PAS are engaged on further senior recruitment of Legal and Accounting expertise at Principal Officer equivalent level.

A significant element of the non-pay allocation provided to the ODCE provides for possible legal costs. These costs, as well as their timing, are difficult to forecast as the ODCE has little or no control over the timing of when the cases will be determined. It is also the case that the ODCE cannot be sure of the outcome of cases in terms of costs orders and it cannot anticipate the scale of costs that other parties may seek. Whilst it is entirely prudent that provision continue to be made to meet legal costs in the ODCE's subhead, the corollary of the uncertainty in relation to amount, timing etc. of such costs can lead to underspends. This has been the case for the last number of years where ODCE legal costs have been significantly less than anticipated thus giving rise to repeated underspends.

IDA Site Visits

156. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of site visits the IDA has made to County Waterford in 2017 in view of the fact that the average unemployment figures in County Waterford are 3% above the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26818/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): There were three IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits to County Waterford in the first quarter of 2017. In 2016 there was a total of 17 site visits to the County.

It is important to remember that the number of site visits is not necessarily an accurate measure of the level of foreign direct investment (FDI) activity in an area. That is because approximately 70% of all FDI won by IDA Ireland comes from its existing client base, rather than new companies.

Similarly, site visit statistics are not necessarily reflective either of the level of employment. CSO figures show that in January this year, there were 7,823 people in Waterford County and 9,271 people in Waterford City on the Live Register. These figures represent decreases of 1,084 and 1,310 respectively over the previous 12 months.

While more work remains to be done, the jobs situation in the South East is improving.

Since 2012 it has had the fastest rate of employment growth, in percentage terms, of any region in the country. Almost 215,000 people are now at work in the South East, which is an increase of 33,500 since 2012.

Waterford also remains home to 35 existing IDA Ireland client companies who employ 6,135 people in a range of manufacturing and service operations. The County gained a net increase of 561 Agency supported jobs in 2016.

These figures demonstrate that the overall employment trend is one of steady improvement and I remain positive that the region will benefit from continued job creation.

Employment Support Services

157. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to ensure that training opportunities, help and support are put in place by Enterprise Ireland to support the 33 manufacturing workers that will lose their jobs in a company (details supplied) in October 2017 when manufacturing will cease; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26819/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The news that jobs will be lost at this company was very disappointing. The Government will, however, make every State support available to employees being impacted and the relevant Departments and Agencies will work collectively to help workers transition and find new employment opportunities. This will include the provision of re-training, if required.

While more work remains to be done, I would like to highlight the strong progress that has been made towards reducing unemployment in the South East Region over recent years. The most recent CSO data shows that the unemployment rate in the Region has fallen from a peak of 20.1% in 2012 to 9.3% in Q1 2017. Since 2012, the South East has also had the fastest rate of jobs growth, in percentage terms, of any region in the country. I am therefore optimistic that we will continue to see new jobs being generated across the wider South East area.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

158. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether it would be in the consumer interest if a company (details supplied) only allowed its own policy holders to access clinics in view of the recent approval by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission for the company to take full ownership of clinics. [26832/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory body responsible for the enforcement of domestic and EU competition and consumer law in the State. Section 9 (5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions, including in relation to merger/ acquisition determinations. As merger/ acquisition determinations form part of the statutory functions of the CCPC, I, as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation have no direct function in the matter.

However, I am informed that the CCPC recently assessed and approved the acquisition of sole control of Aras Slainte Limited by Vhi Investments DAC.

The CCPC's role in relation to merger/acquisition determinations is statutorily restricted to

examining whether the proposed transaction would result in a “substantial lessening of competition” as provided for in Section 20 of the Competition Act 2002.

During the extended investigation, I am informed that the CCPC requested and received, on an on-going basis, further information and clarifications from the notifying parties and third parties. The CCPC’s analysis of the proposed transaction involved an in-depth economic assessment of the affected relevant markets, consultation with third parties and an assessment of the potential impact of the proposed transaction on consumers.

I understand that the CCPC has formed the view that the transaction will not substantially lessen competition in any market for goods or services in the State. This view was formed on the basis that the transaction would impact on three Vhi SwiftCare clinics in the State – two in Dublin and one in Cork - and as such, there are a multitude of other primary care options (e.g., GPs, A&E departments in public and private hospitals, etc.) active in the potential markets in Dublin and Cork. The CCPC also considers that other health insurers could either introduce their own clinics or seek to make arrangements with other health facilities to provide a similar service to their customers.

In addition, I am informed that the CCPC sought, and was given, assurances from Vhi that any changes to access to Vhi SwiftCare clinics for customers of other health insurers would be communicated in advance in a timely and widespread manner to affected health insurance policy-holders.

My colleague, the Minister for Health, has policy responsibility for health insurance.

Brexit Negotiations

159. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the threats identified by her Department with regard to the responsibilities of her Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26906/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach’s speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland’s economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these. There is a whole of Government approach in place focusing on Brexit issues and my Department and its agencies are to the forefront of this effort.

Given the wide mission of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the UK's decision to leave the European Union will impact significantly on all policy fields across my Department as well as our family of Agencies. Over the past number of months, I have tasked my Department officials with making Brexit their number one priority.

In advance of the Referendum my Department conducted a contingency risk assessment of the potential impacts of Brexit across policy areas of my Department. We have refined our analysis post-Referendum and we have been working with Agencies to put in place actions to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities.

We have also been working with colleagues across Government to analysis potential sectoral impacts and consider the implications of various scenarios which may emerge as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

My department has been building an understanding of companies' needs in adapting to the challenges posed by Brexit and to develop appropriate and targeted responses to support them. I recently published the results of a survey of over 1,000 enterprises.

In response to the results of the survey we are developing a Brexit Working Capital Guarantee Scheme and scoping out the need for a longer term Business Development Loan Scheme to assist firms in investing for a post-Brexit environment.

My Department has funded a research project commissioned by InterTrade Ireland to improve our understanding of the impact on cross border trade of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit. This study has recently been published.

We are also undertaking research to examine the implications for the most exposed enterprise sectors of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union.

In addition we are profiling the composition of trade and investment for Ireland and a range of EU Member States with the UK – this will provide an evidence base to inform Ireland's policy positions as part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU.

Finally, the Action Plan for 2017 is at the core of the government's response to the huge challenge these pose for businesses.

Civil Service Staff Data

160. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Civil Service clerical officers in full time employment as of 31 May 2017 by county and by Department, in tabular form. [26928/17]

161. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full time Civil Service clerical officers that have either retired, resigned or been promoted from 1 January 2015 to 31 May 2017, by county and by Department, in tabular form. [26929/17]

162. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full time Civil Service clerical officer appointments made from 1 January 2015 to 31 May 2017, by county and by Department, in tabular form. [26930/17]

163. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of temporary Civil Service clerical officer appointments made from 1 January 2015 to 31 May 2017, by county and by Department, in tabular form. [26931/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 to 163, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables

Clerical Officers in full time employment as of 31st May 2017

It should be noted that my Department does not appoint TCO/CO staff on a part-time basis. It does however facilitate a number of staff (numbers included), upon their own request, with a reduced working pattern.

COUNTY	REDUCED WORK PATTERN	FULL WORK PATTERN	TOTAL
Dublin	46	125	171
Carlow	11	43	54
Kilkenny	4	12	16
Sligo	0	1	1
Shannon	1	0	1
Other (posts outside of Ireland)	0	1	1
Total	62	182	244

Clerical Officers who have retired, resigned or been promoted 1st January 2015-31st May 2017

RETIREMENTS

County	2015	2016	2017
Dublin	2	3	4
Carlow	1	0	0
Kilkenny	0	0	0
Sligo	0	0	0
Total	3	3	4

RESIGNATIONS

County	2015	2016	2017
Dublin	2	3	2
Carlow	0	1	0
Kilkenny	0	0	0
Sligo	0	0	0
Total	2	4	2

PROMOTIONS

County	2015	2016	2017
Dublin	12	17	4
Carlow	0	2	0
Kilkenny	1	0	1
Sligo	0	0	1
Total	13	19	6

Clerical Officer appointments 1st January 2015- 31st May 2017

COUNTY	2015	2016	2017
Dublin	3	22	12
Carlow	5	8	5
Kilkenny	0	2	0
Total	8	32	17

Temporary Clerical Officer appointments 1st January 2015-31st May 2017

COUNTY	2015	2016	2017
Dublin	8	6	2
Carlow	0	1	3
Kilkenny	0	0	0
Sligo	0	0	0
Total	8	7	5

Pensions Data

164. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No.378 of 23 May 2017, if she will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of her Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26975/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Details of pension contributions made by public sector workers in agencies under the aegis of my Department, excluding those that are covered by the Civil Service Pension Scheme/ Single Public Service Pension Scheme, are set out in the tables.

2010

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€6,670,261
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€788,010
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€37,237
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€1,006,859
Health and Safety Authority	€1,428,352.02
IDA Ireland	€2,393,211
Science Foundation Ireland	€524,527

2011

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€6,495,494
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€1,030,352
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€31,640
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€871,558
Health and Safety Authority	€1,411,611.26
IDA Ireland	€2,256,937

Questions - Written Answers

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Science Foundation Ireland	€475,793

2012

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€5,851,260
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€935,548
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€27,610
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€793,397
Health and Safety Authority	€1,403,532.53
IDA Ireland	€2,072,587
Science Foundation Ireland	€489,239

2013

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€5,498,974
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€792,624
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€21,248
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€769,887
Health and Safety Authority	€1,355,041.02
IDA Ireland	€2,074,823
Science Foundation Ireland	€438,715

2014

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€5,262,456
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€1,837,159
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€25,006
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€1,090,605
Health and Safety Authority	€1,328,376.84
IDA Ireland	€2,010,705
Science Foundation Ireland	€411,425

2015

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€5,035,190
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€234,880
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€28,761
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€1,079,408
Health and Safety Authority	€1,404,913.36
IDA Ireland	€1,900,177

Science Foundation Ireland	€425,584
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2016

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€4,231,077
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€191,628
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€17,260
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€934,745
Health and Safety Authority	€1,242,958.12
IDA Ireland	€1,786,764
Science Foundation Ireland	€381,871

2017

Agency	Amount contributed by employees to pensions
Enterprise Ireland Contributions	€1,722,110 (1st Jan – 31st May)
LEO/CEB Contributions Paid to EI	€33,251 (1st Jan – 31st May)
Design & Craft Council Ireland paid to EI	€11,234 (1st Jan – 31st May)
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€413,468 (1st Jan – 2nd June)
Health and Safety Authority	€507,840.18
IDA Ireland	See note 1 below
Science Foundation Ireland	€160,897

1. **IDA Ireland** - 2017 figures have been excluded as IDA Ireland does not make these figures public until signed off by auditors.

Disability Act Employment Targets

165. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in her Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of her Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27140/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department as a public service employer has a legal obligation under the Disability Act 2005 to report each year on the number and percentage of employees with disabilities. Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the following obligations on Government Departments and public service bodies with regard to the employment of people with disabilities.

- Public bodies must, insofar as practicable, take all reasonable measures to promote and support their employment of people with disabilities.

- Public bodies shall ensure, unless there are good reasons for not doing so, that at least 3% of their employees are people with disabilities.

- Public bodies must report on an annual basis to a statutory monitoring committee in their

parent Department on the number of people with disabilities in their employment and the measures they are taking to promote and support their employment. The monitoring committees in turn submit their reports on such compliance to the Minister of their parent Department and the National Disability Authority (NDA).

In order to build an accurate record of the number of staff with disabilities, in accordance with the legal definition in the 2005 Act, every employee, whether or not they have any impairment or disability, is asked to complete a census form and return it, in confidence, to the nominated person. While public bodies have a statutory obligation to report, there is no obligation on employees to disclose if they have a disability.

Under the Disability Act, public bodies staffed by civil servants report via the Monitoring Committee in Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, while all other public bodies report via the Monitoring Committee in their parent Departments. Public bodies must report to their Monitoring Committees by 31st March each year. Each Monitoring Committee must then report to its respective Minister and the National Disability Authority by the 30th June.

At 31st December 2015, my Department had 842 employees. Of these, 48 declared that they had a disability. This represents 5.7% of the Department's Staff.

As the Monitoring Committees have not yet reported on the 2016 figures - albeit that this data is being collated at this time - the latest figures available in respect of my Department and the bodies within its remit are the 2015 figures listed in the table below.

Name of Body	Total Employees 2015	No of employees with a disability 2015	% of employees with a disability 2015
Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation	842	48	5.7%
Competition and Consumer Protection Commission	70	5	7.1%
Enterprise Ireland	563	16	2.8%
Health & Safety Authority	175	6	3.4%
IDA Ireland	307	13	4.2%
InterTrade Ireland	39	1	2.6%
National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)	130	5	3.8%
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	67	0	0%
Science Foundation Ireland	49	2	4.1%

All staff of the Department are recruited through the Public Appointments Service, except Service and Cleaning staff, which occasionally administers competitions specifically for persons with disabilities.

Departmental Contracts Data

166. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by her Department or agency or body under the aegis of her Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27454/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has not awarded any contracts to the company in question since March 2011. Contracts awarded by agencies under the aegis of my Department are operational matters for the agencies concerned. The agencies have informed me that no payments have been made to the company in the period in question.

Departmental Expenditure

167. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount her Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27712/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since my appointment as Minister, my Department has not made any payments to the company in question. Any payments to the company by agencies under the aegis of my Department are operational matters for the agencies concerned. I have asked the agencies to provide details of any such payments and I will forward to the Deputy once received.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Investigations

168. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views regarding public concerns relating to a case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27737/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The investigative shortcomings of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) identified by Judge John Aylmer in this case fell far short of the standard of impartial, unbiased and thorough investigation we expect and demand.

My predecessor, Minister of State Mitchell O'Connor, wrote to the Director of Corporate Enforcement on Wednesday May 24th, requesting a report under section 955(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2014. This report is to outline issues arising from the investigations by the ODCE into Anglo Irish Bank since 2008. In particular, she ordered that the report include an explanation of the following:

- the coaching of witness statements;
- late disclosure of documents;
- a perceived bias by ODCE investigators;
- the shredding of documents; and
- any other relevant matters.

This report is to be finalised as a matter of urgency and no later than June 23rd. All options

will be considered to ensure mistakes of this nature cannot reoccur.

Job Retention

169. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies her Department is currently liaising with to ensure their survival and retention of their jobs. [27798/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am deeply engaged with my Department's agencies - Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland as well as through the Local Enterprise Offices - to ensure sufficient supports are in place to safeguard Irish jobs and exports in response to both the short term and long term impact of Brexit. I am in ongoing communication with these agencies through my chairing my Department's Brexit Co-ordination Group, which includes the chief executives of the agencies.

I have met frequently with representatives of companies, business organisations and other stakeholders throughout the country in recent months to hear about their challenges and concerns arising from BREXIT and its possible consequences.

My Department's 2017 budget contains many measures to help Irish businesses to become more competitive and cope with the impact of Brexit. It includes an extra €52 million in capital funding to support the enterprise sector. Additional current moneys have also been secured to provide up to 50 extra staff for my Department and its enterprise agencies.

Enterprise Ireland is in close and regular contact with the 1500 clients that export to the UK, and in particular to those 600 companies, employing 40,000 people, that have a significant exposure to the UK market.

Training and supports provided by EI in terms of management capability, leadership, competitiveness, marketing/sales skills, market research, trade promotion, innovation and R&D is being intensified to help companies to build market share and create new market opportunities.

Through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) a range of measures is being put in place to supplement existing supports, including:

- Supports to facilitate micro enterprises to develop new internationalisation opportunities;
- Roll out of a national "Lean for Micro" initiative to drive firm level competitiveness;
- Brexit-focused mentoring and training initiatives; and
- Local level awareness raising and information sharing about Brexit, including; seminars, workshops and cross-border business networking.

IDA Ireland has a clear Brexit Plan, which includes one-to-one investor engagements, public relations/media campaign and an international marketing campaign. The Agency has a Brexit Committee to oversee its response to the opportunities and challenges arising from Brexit.

IDA Ireland believes there are potential FDI opportunities for Ireland from Brexit. The potential sources of FDI are likely to come from: existing IDA Clients with a presence in Ireland who also have a presence in the UK, overseas clients (US, European and Asian) who have a presence in the UK but not in Ireland, UK companies operating in the UK who now need certain access to the European Market, and International clients without a presence in Europe seeking a European home.

In Budget 2017 I was also able to provide additional funding to InterTrade Ireland, the Cross Border Body which has specific responsibility for developing Cross Border Trade. InterTrade Ireland is undertaking a range of initiatives for SMEs trading across the border to help them adapt to the changed circumstances. Assistance will include the provision of factual advice, supports for capability building and the provision of other specialist expertise.

Finally I would like to draw attention to Enterprise Ireland's #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign featuring the 'Brexit SME Scorecard' on www.prepareforbrexit.ie. The 'Brexit SME Scorecard' is a new interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies, whether they are EI clients or not, to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars.

The Scorecard generates an immediate report which provides advice as well as information on supports and resources to Irish businesses preparing for Brexit. The Prepare for Brexit website also includes case studies of clients who have achieved export success in a range of key sectors and markets and features tips and advice. Enterprise Ireland is also running a series of Brexit events featuring expert speakers throughout the country to promote the tool and encourage companies to prepare for Brexit.

Brexit Issues

170. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of contacts her Department has received from companies seeking to relocate here as a result of Brexit. [27799/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The IDA, as the State Agency tasked with winning foreign direct investment (FDI), is responsible for working with companies that are considering expanding or locating in Ireland. The IDA continues to work hard to attract such new investment here, including opportunities connected to Brexit.

As I have said before, however, convincing overseas companies to invest in Ireland can be a delicate process that requires perseverance and patience. This is especially the case with regard to Brexit-related investment. It is therefore not in the country's interests to describe or quantify, in detail, the engagement to date between the IDA and new investors or any inquiries that may have been received. In fact, to do so would risk both compromising the progress that has been made with prospective new clients of the IDA and losing the potential jobs that might accompany any such new future investment here.

I am confident that Ireland will remain attractive to new investment in the time ahead, whether Brexit-related or otherwise, and that we will continue to see significant FDI-related job creation. That is because the attributes that have made this country one of the leading global locations for FDI – including our talented workforce, first-rate education system and pro-enterprise policy environment – continue to be highly valued by multinational companies.

Employment Rights

171. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to issues regarding persistent breaches of employment law in the film and television production industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27800/17]

172. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the widespread use of bogus self-employment in the film and television production industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27802/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

I am aware of concerns regarding the employment rights protections for workers in the film and television production industry, including in particular the issue of bogus self-employment. These concerns were raised in both Houses of the Oireachtas during the debates on the Competition (Amendment) Bill 2016. They were also raised with me by one of the bodies representing employees in this sector.

All employers, including those in the film and television production industry, carry the same obligations in relation to compliance with employment law. Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees they may refer a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) where the matter can be dealt with by way of mediation or adjudication leading to a decision that is enforceable through the District Court. WRC inspectors can also be asked to investigate certain breaches. Complaints can be made on a single complaint form available at the WRC's website *www.workplacelrelations.ie*.

It is important that individuals are correctly designated regarding their employment status so that those who ought to be designated as employees are not deprived of their employment rights. This is particularly the case for vulnerable workers who may not feel in a position to object to certain arrangements. However, it is also important to remember that some working in this industry may be correctly categorised as self-employed.

In most cases it will be clear whether an individual is employed or self-employed. Where there is doubt in relation to the employment status of an individual the relevant Departments and Agencies will have regard to the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals. This Code was drawn up and agreed in 2007 by the relevant Government Departments with ICTU and IBEC.

Finally, I welcome the enactment of the Competition (Amendment) Act 2017, which began as a Private Member's Bill. The Act is intended to establish rights for certain categories of self-employed individuals to be represented by a trade union for the purposes of collective bargaining. I believe that this Act, which met with all Party support in both Houses of the Oireachtas, provides a fine balance in meeting the stated objectives underpinning it whilst, at the same time, remaining consistent with competition law. It will be of benefit to voice-over actors, session musicians and freelance journalists and it also provides for an application process whereby Trade Unions can apply for an exemption from the application of section 4 of the Competition Act 2002 to collective bargaining and agreements in respect of other specific classes of self-employed workers.

Appointments to State Boards

173. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under her remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28217/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):

ald): No former TD's have been appointed to any State Boards under my Department's remit by the Public Appointments Service.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Legal Cases

174. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount paid by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement to companies (details supplied) regarding a court case involving the ODCE and a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27993/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed that the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement made no payments to either of the named entities in relation to the court case referred to by the Deputy.

Postal Codes

175. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount spent by her Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28142/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): At the introduction of Eircode, the relevant Eircodes for the various locations of my Department and its offices were circulated to all staff who were instructed to use these in all correspondence going forward. In addition, our website has been updated to include Eircode and as stocks of stationery are depleted, replacement printed material includes Eircode information. Where an Eircode has been provided by a correspondent with my Department, the Eircode will be used in future correspondence to that address. Our ICT systems include vacant fields that were utilised to incorporate Eircodes without any development costs. The changes outlined incurred no additional cost to my Department.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

176. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of employees in the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and InterTradeIreland respectively in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [28167/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The number of full time equivalent employees in Enterprise Ireland, InterTrade Ireland and IDA Ireland for the end of year 2007 to end quarter 1 2017, are listed below.

End Year	Enterprise Ireland-Full time equivalents	InterTrade Ireland-Full time equivalents	IDA Ireland Full time equivalents
2007	844	44.75	275
2008	834	45.91	282
2009	841	42.11	268
2010	828	43.3	264
2011	797	47.11	249
2012	742	39.10	250

End Year	Enterprise Ireland- Full time equivalents	InterTrade Ireland- Full time equivalents	IDA Ireland Full time equivalents
2013	648.5	38.90	263.75
2014	631	37.54	251.75
2015	563	37.52	248.95
2016	564	36.52	259.35
Q1 2017	571.5	33.59	261.35

Departmental Agencies Staff Recruitment

177. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of job vacancies in the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and InterTradeIreland respectively. [28168/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Enterprise Ireland currently has 45 Ireland-based vacancies and 36 vacancies across the organisation's overseas network.

IDA Ireland is actively recruiting to fill 24 vacancies.

InterTrade Ireland has no vacancies.

Vacancies in Agencies such as EI, IDA etc, generally arise on an ongoing basis due to natural attrition (retirements, resignation and death-in-service), as well as the allocation of additional posts in response to Brexit and the nature of each Agency's resourcing model.

The majority of roles in the overseas network are filled on a fixed term contract basis and therefore at any given time, due to the expiry of contracts, a number of posts may be vacant. This model is required to ensure we retain the flexibility to adequately resource our overseas markets to match the market opportunities for our clients.

An intensive recruitment programme is underway to fill the vacancies with the most appropriate candidates, bringing the relevant specialist skill sets and experience as required for these critical roles.

Departmental Agencies Funding

178. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the budget allocation of the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and InterTradeIreland for each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [28169/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The tables that follow show the annual funding provision made to Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Inter-Trade Ireland through my Department's Vote for the period 2007 to date. The allocations were approved by the Houses of the Oireachtas and published in the Annual Revised Estimates Volumes for the years in question.

The 2010 allocations are taken from the Further Revised Estimates Volume that was undertaken that year to take into account the transfer of various functions to and from my Department's Vote.

Enterprise Ireland

	Current €m	Capital €m
2007	€115.550	€156.352
2008	€118.799	€177.645 plus €5m in capital carryover
2009	€109.974	€220.736m plus €4m in capital carryover
2010	€100.648	€197.393
2011	€100.839	€203.893
2012	€93.229	€202.500 plus €18.125m in capital carryover
2013	€85.526	€182.000
2014	€80.873	€159.600 plus €11m in capital carryover
2015	€83.722	€163.430 Plus €12m in capital carryover
2016	€79.887	€173.600
2017	€84.502	€185.000

IDA Ireland

	Current €m	Capital €m
2007	€42.223	€98.520
2008	€45.230	€98.520
2009	€41.877	€73.594
2010	€39.240	€86.000 Plus €5m in capital carryover
2011	€38.577	€86.000
2012	€35.822	€86.000
2013	€38.447	€79.000 Plus €7m in capital carryover
2014	€38.607	€89.000 Plus €3m in capital carryover
2015	€40.316	€90.000 Plus €5m in capital carryover Plus €21m in Supplementary Estimate, December 2015
2016	€41.680	€112.000 Plus €10m in capital carryover
2017	€42.264	€137.000

Inter-Trade Ireland

	Current €m	Capital €m
2007	€2.726	€9.166
2008	€2.968	€7.714 Plus €1.2m in capital carryover
2009	€2.499	€6.000
2010	€2.037	€5.811
2011	€2.041	€6.000
2012	€2.009	€6.000
2013	€2.085	€6.000
2014	€2.002	€5.760
2015	€1.924	€5.530
2016	€1.935	€5.530
2017	€2.265	€5.695

The Deputy should note that the funding provision to Enterprise Ireland covers their two subheads on my Department's Vote, Subheads A7 and B4, which span general supports to indigenous firms and for research and development/innovation supports.

The table above does not capture other Exchequer funding provided over the period to Enterprise Ireland from the Votes of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment.

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland are also provided with funding from the National Training Fund (NTF).

The operations of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland are also supported through the generation, retention and use of Agency Own Resource Income, which is subject to annual sanction by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The funding provision to Inter-Trade Ireland is provided on a North-South basis and annual allocations are finalised in conjunction with the Northern Administration. Over the period some cuts were imposed jointly by the Finance Departments North and South in certain years. This meant that the allocation provided through my Department's Vote had to be adjusted proportionally given the joint-funding arrangement in place. In addition, the Northern Irish administration imposed a unilateral cut in 2015. Also, as the working currency of the Body is Sterling by virtue of being based in Newry, Co. Down, other adjustments were necessary in respect of some years, to take account of exchange rate fluctuations between the Euro and Sterling.

The respective agency expenditure drawdown from my Department's Vote to the end of May 2017 is set out in the table below.

2017 Expenditure Year to Date (end May 2017)	Current	Capital
Enterprise Ireland	€31.91 million	€46.64 million
IDA Ireland	€15.91 million	€25.50 million
InterTrade Ireland	€0.74 million	€1.64 million

Brexit Issues

179. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of funding allocated to the be prepared grant run by Enterprise Ireland;

the number of applicants to date in 2017; and the number of grants awarded to date in 2017. [28170/17]

180. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses that have completed the Enterprise Ireland Brexit scorecard to date; and if the results of these scorecards will be published. [28171/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 and 180 together.

In March 2017, Enterprise Ireland (EI) launched its “Brexit SME Scorecard”. The Scorecard is a new interactive online platform which can be used by Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. By completing the online questionnaire, the Brexit SME Scorecard will provide companies with an assessment of their preparedness under six key pillars - Business Strategy, Operations, Innovation, Sales and Marketing, Finance and People Management. The Scorecard then generates an immediate report which contains suggested actions, resources and information on events to attend, to prepare for Brexit. The SME Scorecard is available to all companies as a starting point for companies to develop an action plan to help mitigate risks and leverage opportunities which may arise from Brexit.

EI client companies that utilise the Brexit Scorecard will then be able to engage with the agency’s experts both domestically and through the overseas offices in global markets.

To date over 923 companies have used the EI Brexit Scorecard to help assess their level of preparedness for Brexit.

Because the scorecard is intended primarily as a tool for companies to self diagnose their preparedness for Brexit, it is not EI’s intention to publish any analysis of clients’ responses to the scorecard.

EI’s #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign also includes a “Be Prepared Grant” that supports the costs of EI’s SME clients in preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities. This Grant can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and out of pocket expenses associated with researching the direction of their Brexit action plan. This might involve developing new strategies to maintain and grow existing UK exports, investigating the feasibility of diversifying to new markets and market segments; investment in innovation; improvement in operational competitiveness; enhancement of strategic financial capability.

There have been a number of applications for the “Be Prepared Grant” and as the approvals come on stream over the next couple of months, Enterprise Ireland (EI) will report them. EI do not publish grant application information, only grant approvals information. This is standard practice for all grant approvals’ processes.

EI is currently running a Brexit regional roadshow to encourage companies to examine their potential exposure to Brexit, complete the Scorecard and use the “Be Prepared Grant” to plan their strategic response to Brexit.

Departmental Staff Data

181. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the employees employed in the Brexit unit of her Department by category. [28172/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges in its work plans for 2017 across all of its Divisions.

A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs, Trade Policy and Safety and Chemicals Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. The Unit is currently made up of 1 Principal, 1 Assistant Principal, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. Additional staffing resources are being recruited to support the Brexit Unit, and other areas of the Department impacted by Brexit in the immediate period ahead.

Low Pay Commission Report

182. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the Low Pay Commission has reported to the Minister of State on reviewing the board and lodgings rates for au pairs; when she will make a decision on this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28246/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The position is that last September, the then Minister for Employment and Small Business, Pat Breen T.D. asked the Low Pay Commission as part of their 2017 Work Programme, to review the board and lodgings rates that are provided for under the national minimum wage legislation.

The Low Pay Commission examined the board and lodgings rates for all employees that are covered by the national minimum wage legislation.

Under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 (National Minimum Hourly Rate of Pay) Order 2000 (SI No. 95/2000) certain reckonable components may be taken into account for all workers to determine an employee’s average hourly rate. The Act provides for the following amounts:

€54.13 for board and lodgings per week, or €7.73 per day;

€32.14 for board only per week, or €4.60 per day;

€21.85 for lodgings only per week, or €3.14 per day.

Thus, if an employer provides an employee with full board and lodgings, or lodgings only or full board only, the monetary allowances set out above can be included as reckonable pay.

The closing date for submissions to the Low Pay Commission Review was the 10th of January last. The Commission considered the submissions received and examined all the available evidence.

The Commission submitted its report to Minister Breen on 5th May. I am currently considering the content of the report and will present it to Cabinet in the coming weeks. It will then be published on the Low Pay Commissions website.

Employment Rights

183. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 680 of 4 April 2017, if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a company (details supplied) does not recognise the trade union that represents the workers affected and instead claims that a works council based in Britain is the representative body; and if she will consider initiating a referral to the redundancy panel in relation to these redundancies should the workers concerned request this via their representative union in view of this fact. [28255/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can confirm that I received a complaint from a trade union alleging that the employer in question was in breach of the Protection of Employment Act 1977. That Act imposes certain obligations on employers where they propose collective redundancies. Officials in my Department have sought information from the employer to allow the complaint to be considered further and this process is on-going.

As I explained to the Deputy in response to her earlier question, number 680 of 4 April, on the basis of clarifications provided by the employer to my Department, it would appear that the collective redundancies in question do not come within the meaning of exceptional collective redundancies. Furthermore, and again as I explained in response to the Deputy on 4 April, under the Protection of Employment (Exceptional Collective Redundancies and Related Matters) Act 2007 it is either the employees' representative or the employer who triggers whether a proposal to create collective redundancies should be referred to the Redundancy Panel. If it is the employees' representative that requests the matter to be referred to the Redundancy Panel, they must act with the approval of the majority of those whom they represent.

Work Permits Data

184. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of work permits granted for non-EU nationals to work in the hotel industry and as chefs here in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28286/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In relation to the employment of non-EEA nationals, the State's general policy is to promote the sourcing of skills needs from within the workforce of Ireland and the European Economic Area (EEA is made up of the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). The employment permits system, which my Department administers, is intended to offer an interim solution for employers where specific skills prove difficult to source within the EEA. The system offers a conduit into the Irish labour market for non-EEA nationals with in-demand skills and is operated as a vacancy-led system. The system is ordered by the use of lists which determine which occupations are highly demanded and which are ineligible for consideration for employment permits. Occupations not included on either list are considered eligible occupations but are subject to a labour market needs test. Changes to access to the Irish labour market for specific occupations via the employment permits system are made on the basis of research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) in tandem with a consultation process, as part of a package of measures to meet those skills needs.

Overall, in 2015, 184 employment permits were granted for occupations in the accommodation and food service sector which includes the hotel industry. In 2016, 290 employment permits were granted in respect of this sector and in 2017 to date, 95 employment permits have been granted.

The vast majority of these employment permits were granted in respect of chefs. In 2015, 144 employment permits were granted for chefs; in 2016 the figure was 287; in 2017 to date 83 have been granted. Currently, chefs with expertise in a non-EEA cuisine at the level of executive chef, head chef, sous chef and specialist chef are eligible for employment permits. My Department's policy with regard to providing employment permits for these specific categories of chefs is that it is recognised that having a wide range of cuisines in the restaurant sector supports Ireland being an attractive destination for tourists.

In addition, employment in the hotel industry generally involves employments that are currently ineligible for employment permits - for example bar workers and catering support staff, spa workers and cleaning staff - as the research of the EGFSN has not indicated a skill shortage in these types of occupations. However, Dependent/Partner/Spouse Employment Permits or Reactivation Employment Permits may be granted for ineligible occupations and these employment permits mainly account for the remaining permits granted in respect of the accommodation and food sector.

The lists of highly skilled and ineligible occupations are reviewed on a twice yearly basis. The current review is underway and consideration is being given to submissions received, including those from the hospitality sector, as part of the public consultation in April. It is expected the review will be completed over the coming months. The exact duration of the review will depend on the complexity involved in assessing and responding to the data received. However, I would anticipate that it will be September when the outcome will be available.

IDA Supports

185. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will ensure that County Monaghan is placed on the IDA agenda (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28342/17]

186. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will ensure that County Cavan is placed on the IDA agenda (details supplied). [28343/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

Regional development is a key goal of this Government and I am particularly aware of the need to create sustainable employment in border areas, including County Monaghan.

IDA Ireland is focused on increasing investment in Monaghan and is currently finalising a masterplan for its business park in the County. The Agency is also progressing, in partnership with Monaghan County Council, a proposed joint initiative for technology units in the business park to assist with marketing. I am hopeful that these steps, together with the broader work the IDA undertakes to promote FDI in the border areas, will help to increase levels of investment in Monaghan.

IDA markets Monaghan, together with Cavan, as part of its North East region. There are currently 12 IDA supported companies employing 1,340 people in this area. Enterprise Ireland supports approximately 303 companies in the same region, which collectively employ 10,389 people. Both Agencies remain determined to grow these numbers further and to create more employment in Cavan and Monaghan.

Company Law

187. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the company law review group's progress to date regarding examining existing legislation and reporting back with recommendations to safeguard a company's employees and unsecured creditors in the case of insolvencies; when this report will be completed; and if she will provide an overview of the current regulatory framework in this area. [28393/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In January 2016, the then Minister requested the Company Law Review Group (CLRG) to review company law with a view to recommending ways company law could be potentially amended to ensure better safeguards for employees and unsecured creditors. An ad-hoc committee of the CLRG was formed to explore relevant issues. It met 14 times in total and reported its findings to the 81st Plenary Meeting of the CLRG on 13th June 2017. A draft report is in the process of being finalised for adoption by the CLRG and it is due to be submitted for my consideration by the CLRG in early July.

I understand that the CLRG report will provide a comprehensive and detailed evaluation of all the relevant provisions of the Companies Act 2014 relevant to employees and unsecured creditors in an insolvency situation. I look forward to receipt of the report and to considering its findings and recommendations in the coming weeks.

Departmental Agencies Funding

188. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the Exchequer funding allocated in 2017 to each State agency under her aegis in 2017, in tabular form. [28394/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The distribution of exchequer funding allocations as per the 2017 Revised Estimates Volume for each Agency under the aegis of my Department and as provided through my Department's Vote this year is set out in the table below.

Intertrade Ireland	-
Pay	€1.262m
Pensions	€103k
Non-Pay	€900k
Capital	€5.695m
Total	€7.960m
IDA Ireland	
Pay	€22.454m
Pensions	€1.750m
Non-Pay	€18.060m
Capital	€137.000m
Total	€179.264m
National Standards Authority of Ireland	

Questions - Written Answers

Intertrade Ireland	-
Pay	€4.353m
Pensions	€900k
Non-Pay	€49k
Capital	€500k
Total	€5.802m
Enterprise Ireland	
Pay	€50.700m
Pensions	€3.239m
Non-Pay	€30.563m
Capital	€185.000m
Total	€269.502m
Science Foundation Ireland	
Pay	€4.432m
Pensions	€14k
Non-Pay	€5.685m
Capital	€162.500m
Total	€172.631m
Health And Safety Authority	
Pay	€10.587m
Pensions	€1.065m
Non-Pay	€6.460m
Total	€18.112m
Competition and Consumer Protection Commission	
Pay	€7.114m
Pensions	€580k
Non-Pay	€4.444m
Total	€12.138m
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	
Pensions	€228k
Total	€228k
Low Pay Commission	
Pay	€247k
Pensions	€230k
Total	€477k
Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority	
Pay	€2.100m

Pensions	€5k
Total	€2.105m

The Deputy should note that the funding provision to Enterprise Ireland covers two sub-heads on my Department's Vote, Subheads A7 and B4, which span general supports to indigenous firms and for research and development/innovation supports. The table above shows the combined allocations of the two subheads.

The table above does not capture other Exchequer funding being provided to Enterprise Ireland in 2017 through from the Votes of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment.

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland are also provided with funding from the National Training Fund (NTF).

The operations of a number of the enterprise agencies are also supported through the generation, retention and use of Agency Own Resource Income, which is subject to annual sanction by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Agencies concerned are Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, National Standards Authority of Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority.

The operations of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) is essentially self-financing from the fee generation received from personal injury claims, typically in the region of €12 million per annum.

The operations of the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission are part-funded through fees levied on certain activities provided to clients of both Agencies.

The funding provision to Inter-Trade Ireland is provided on a North-South basis and annual allocations are finalised in conjunction with the Northern Administration.

The Department also provides funding annually to the 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) through Subhead A8 of my Department's Vote. Working closely through the Local Authority system, the LEOs support the micro-enterprise sector in the start-up and expansion phases and stimulate enterprise potential at local level. The 2017 allocation to the LEOs through my Department's Vote totals €32.93 million broken down between €22.5 million in Capital and €10.431 million in Non-Pay monies. The LEOs are also supported through funding provided via the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Vote.

IDA Supports

189. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding IDA planned investments following the closure of a company (details supplied); if this site is owned by the IDA; the number of site visits to this specific site by potential investors since the closure; the process on finding a replacement company; and the number of vacant IDA sites in County Longford. [28402/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I very much regret the decision by Cameron to cease its operations in Ireland. Creating new employment opportunities in County Longford to replace the jobs that will and have been lost remains a priority for my Department and its Agencies.

IDA Ireland has already been working hard to find a new investor for the site in question

and the Agency continues to bring it to the attention of its clients. There have already been three visits to the site and more will be undertaken if required.

IDA Ireland has two properties available for investment in Longford, in both Aghafad and Longford Industrial Park.

Brexit Issues

190. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a report drawn by InterTrade Ireland (details supplied) that the imposition of World Trade Organisation tariffs on trade between the Republic and Northern Ireland after Brexit would result in an economic hit of almost €500 million; and the steps she will take to mitigate this. [28403/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I welcome the publication of this InterTrade Ireland study - which was funded by my Department - as a key contribution to our wider understanding of the potential commercial and economic implications of Brexit for Ireland.

It should be emphasised that this research analyses a ‘worst-case scenario’ whereby WTO tariffs would be imposed in the absence of a comprehensive trade agreement being agreed between the EU and the UK following Brexit. While the Government will be prepared for all eventualities, this is not necessarily the outcome we expect will be reached at the conclusion of negotiations. The InterTrade Ireland study is nevertheless a valuable contribution to the Government’s ongoing work to address the different challenges that Brexit could present for our country. Its findings also reinforce the need to maintain the closest possible trading relationship between the UK and the EU, including Ireland.

I want to make clear that the Government is already working hard to assist businesses in addressing the commercial challenges associated with Brexit. My Department’s enterprise agencies are working daily with companies, large and small, to both mitigate the impacts and maximise the opportunities that the UK’s departure from the EU might present.

Consumer Protection

191. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the regulatory framework surrounding consumer protections in the case of personal contract plans, PCPs, used to finance motor purchases; the regulatory role the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, CCPC, has in this regard; and the data which is collated on PCPs by the CCPC. [28404/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is responsible, under the Consumer Credit Act 1995, for the authorisation of credit intermediaries, some of whom sell Personal Contract Plans (PCPs) to consumers on behalf of a finance company. The CCPC issues licenses to credit intermediaries and keeps an online list of credit intermediaries holding a valid authorisation at the time of enquiry. The CCPC also deals with complaints about the advertising of credit agreements and the advertising of car finance on credit intermediary websites and in the media. It is important to note that the CCPC’s remit is limited to this licensing role, as opposed to a more complex and robust regulatory role like the Central Bank has for financial institutions.

It is worth recalling that the majority of the financial institutions that offer finance through credit intermediaries are already regulated by the Central Bank. However, the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code does not apply to hire purchase or PCPs. This is significant as the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code (in particular, Chapter 5) requires regulated financial services providers to "know their customer" in terms of assessing affordability and suitability of products covered by the Code.

I am aware that the CCPC (and previously, the National Consumer Agency) has made numerous efforts to have hire purchase formally defined as a financial product and thereby brought within the Central Bank's regulatory regime so that PCP (and hire purchase) would be subject to the same regulatory requirements as those that apply to all other financial products sold to consumers in Ireland.

Separate to the licensing role outlined above, the CCPC has a specific statutory remit to provide personal finance information and education to assist consumers to make informed decisions. The CCPC has, on a number of occasions, conducted research into the car market and car finance sectors, and has conducted numerous public awareness campaigns on the issue of car finance in recent years. Its current campaign, which commenced on 5 June, focuses on car finance and specifically aims to provide information to consumers on issues in relation to PCP, such as the fact that the consumer does not become the legal owner of the car until they make the final payment.

I am aware that the CCPC plans to conduct further research into PCP in the second half of this year. The results will be used to clarify the specific issues that consumers encounter in the car finance market. I am advised that it is the CCPC's intention that the research can be used by all interested stakeholders to provide an evidence base from which appropriate policy proposals can be developed to ensure that consumers are adequately protected and businesses adequately scrutinised in this important market.

Workplace Relations Services

192. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the facility available to a person who has been through the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court and that, notwithstanding the final decision of the court, is of the view that procedurally they have not been treated appropriately and would like their treatment to be investigated; and if no such facility exists, if she will consider putting such a facility in place or providing such a person with access to the Ombudsman by amending Part 2 Schedule 2 of the Ombudsman (Amendment) Act 2012. [28600/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Workplace Relations Act, 2015 established the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) as the body to hear all first instance claims made under a wide variety of employment legislation. The Act provides that WRC Adjudication Officers shall be independent in the performance of his or her functions.

Complaints into procedural matters of the WRC can be made at any time, in accordance with the WRC's Customer Service Complaints Procedure; which is available on their website www.workplacerelations.ie.

A decision of the WRC can be appealed to the Labour Court within 42 days, or later if the court is satisfied that the delay was due to the existence of "exceptional circumstances".

The Labour Court is an independent workplace dispute resolution body which deals with

the resolution of disputes concerning industrial relations and appeals of decisions of WRC Adjudication Officers.

A party can refer a Labour Court Decision on an employment rights matter to the High Court, either on the basis of an appeal on a point of law or for judicial review.

The Ombudsman Act 1980 to 2012 is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. I do not consider it necessary to amend the Act insofar as the provisions regarding the exclusion of the Workplace Relations Bodies is concerned.

IDA Portfolio

193. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to build on a site (details supplied) in County Cork in order to attract new businesses; her views on the type of buildings that might be appropriate to attract companies to the site in question; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28631/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): While IDA Ireland has no immediate plans to construct a building on the site in Fermoy Business Park, the property would be suitable for both manufacturing purposes and offices.

The needs of companies vary significantly when it comes to investment sites. I understand that an advantage of the property in question is that it offers flexibility in terms of potential layouts and buildings sizes. This should help make the site more attractive to potential investors.

Employment Rights

194. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to introduce legislation to prohibit private sector employers from forcing persons to retire on age grounds under the age for the State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28645/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Apart from public sector employees, where certain statutory retirement ages may apply, there is no statutory retirement age for employees in Irish legislation. A contract of employment will generally contain a retirement age but this is a matter of contract between the parties.

The upper age limit for bringing claims under the Unfair Dismissals Acts was removed by a provision in the Equality Act 2004. It is now the case that a person of any age, when dismissed, may take a case under the Unfair Dismissals Acts unless she or he has reached the “normal retiring age for employees of the same employer in similar employment”, if one exists. In such circumstances, the burden of proof is on the employer to prove the normal retiring age. Furthermore, the upper age limit of 66 years for receipt of statutory redundancy payments was removed by the Protection of Employment (Exceptional Collective Redundancies and Related Matters) Act 2007.

As the issue that arises around compulsory retirement at a given age is whether this entails discrimination on age grounds, the more usual avenue of redress for employees compulsorily retired is to take a claim, under the Employment Equality Acts, to the Workplace Relations Commission. Responsibility for employment equality legislation rests with the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The Deputy may be aware that an Inter-Departmental Group (IDG), chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), was established by the Government in 2016 to consider policy around retirement age in both the public and private sectors. The IDG's report was published in August 2016. The Report recorded that the recently enacted Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2015 amends Irish equality legislation to bring it into line with the judgments of the CJEU interpreting the relevant provisions in EU Directives, as follows:

Section 34 of the Act of 1998 is amended by the substitution of the following subsection for subsection (4):

“(4) Without prejudice to subsection (3), it shall not constitute discrimination on the age ground to fix different ages for the retirement (whether voluntarily or compulsorily) of employees or any class or description of employees if—

- (a) it is objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim, and
- (b) the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.”.

The amended legislation sets out the grounds on which employers will have to justify the setting of particular retirement ages, such grounds being underpinned by the provisions of the Employment Equality Directive.

The Report points to examples of objective justification including:

- To create opportunities in the labour market for those looking for work
- To encourage recruitment and promotion of young people and prevent possible disputes on the fitness of employees to work beyond a certain age
- To ensure better distribution of work between the generations
- To ensure quality of service provision and address an age imbalance within a workforce
- To ensure motivation and dynamism through the increased prospect of promotion due to senior staff being retired.

The IDG made a number of recommendations, one of which related to my specific area of responsibility. On foot of that recommendation a Ministerial request issued to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to request them to prepare a Code of Practice under Section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 around the issue of working longer, which should set out best industrial relations practice in managing the engagement between employers and employees in the run up to retirement, including requests to work beyond what would be considered the normal retirement age in the employment concerned. Work by the WRC on preparing the Code in consultation with relevant stakeholders is at an advanced stage.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

195. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if all State bodies under the aegis of her Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28672/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The following is the position regarding the furnishing of reports confirming compliance with tax law obligations by the state agencies under the aegis of my Department:

Enterprise Ireland has included confirmation of tax compliance for 2015 in the agency's 2016 letter to the Minister. Enterprise Ireland will again be confirming the same compliance for 2016 in the Chairperson's letter to the Minister over the coming weeks.

The National Standards Authority of Ireland have submitted reports regarding compliance with their obligations under tax law for 2015 included as part of the Chairperson's comprehensive report to the Minister. A report for 2016 will be submitted when it is finalised in the coming weeks

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has furnished its report confirming its compliance with its obligations under tax law for 2015. Its report for 2016 will be submitted to me following completion of the audit of its accounts.

The Personal Injuries Assessment Board has furnished its report confirming its compliance with its obligations under tax law for 2015. I expect to receive its report for 2016 shortly.

The Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority's Annual Report for 2015 and 2016 states that it has systems in place to ensure compliance with all statutory obligations including those relating to taxation. The Agency has confirmed to the best of its knowledge and belief it is tax compliant, and has been so since it was established.

Science Foundation Ireland submitted a statement of tax compliance to the Minister on 20 June 2016 in conjunction with the submission of the SFI 2015 Annual Report. The SFI 2016 Annual Report and accompanying submission has yet to be submitted to the Minister.

IDA Ireland has submitted a report informing me that it has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015. I expect to receive its report for 2016 shortly.

The **Health and Safety Authority** report that it was in compliance with its obligations under tax law for 2015 was submitted to the Minister as part of the HSA 2015 Annual Report. The HSA Annual Report for 2016 is currently being finalised and the HSA 2016 report on compliance with obligations under tax law will be included in this.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Staff

196. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will provide funding for two extra full-time principal solicitor posts for the Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28809/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Two current vacancies within the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE), one for Principal Solicitor and the other for Legal Advisor, have been converted to "Enforcement Portfolio Manager" posts graded at Principal level following restructuring proposals drawn up by the Director of the Office. The necessary funding for these posts is already in place. The Enforcement Portfolio Managers will have responsibility, among other things, for leading and managing a portfolio of cases and projects in both civil and criminal enforcement. In order to be eligible to apply for these posts, prospective candidates must (i) have been called to the Bar or have been admitted and be enrolled as a Barrister or Solicitor in the State

or (ii) be a member of an Accountancy Body recognised by the Irish Auditing & Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA).

Through a recent Civil Service-wide advertisement campaign a number of serving Civil Servants have applied to be considered for one of the posts in question and these applications are due to be considered shortly. The other post is to be filled through open competition. If the first mentioned process does not result in the position being filled, it will also be filled through open competition.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Investigations

197. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she has taken in response to the handling of an investigation (details supplied) by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28895/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The investigative shortcomings of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) identified by Judge John Aylmer in this case fell far short of the standard of impartial, unbiased and thorough investigation we expect and demand.

My predecessor, Minister of State Mitchell O'Connor, wrote to the Director of Corporate Enforcement on Wednesday May 24th, requesting a report under section 955(1)(a) of the Companies Act 2014. This report is to outline issues arising from the investigations by the ODCE into Anglo Irish Bank since 2008. In particular, she ordered that the report include an explanation of the following:

- the coaching of witness statements;
- late disclosure of documents;
- a perceived bias by ODCE investigators;
- the shredding of documents; and
- any other relevant matters.

This report is to be finalised as a matter of urgency and no later than June 23rd. All options will be considered to ensure mistakes of this nature cannot reoccur.

Enterprise Ireland

198. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration has been given or analysis undertaken with regard to expanding Enterprise Ireland's worldwide office network in view of the impact that Brexit will have on the economy; if consideration has been given to or an analysis undertaken of expanding Enterprise Ireland's office network further into eastern Europe; if it has considered Slovakia in particular; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28976/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In Budget 2017, additional funding was provided to Enterprise Ireland (EI) to recruit 39 new staff, located in Ireland and overseas to support clients to maintain existing markets and to

diversify into new markets.

EI has an established process for working with companies as they identify opportunities and begin to enter new markets. Enterprise Ireland's overseas structure, through its network of 32 overseas offices and its extended Pathfinder (Trade Consultant) network, provides client companies with the appropriate support in markets where there are identified opportunities matched by client capability and client demand.

In addition to Incubation and Hot-Desking Facilities, Enterprise Ireland's client companies can access market knowledge on a sectorial basis, introductions to buyers/suppliers/partners in-market and market intelligence such as competitor analysis, identification of professional services etc.

The activities of Enterprise Ireland's overseas network are supported by the Market Research Centre and Strategic Marketing Unit based in Dublin along with a range of financial and capability developments supports aimed at helping client companies to compete and win sales in overseas markets.

As part of its Strategy 2017-2020, EI aims to help Irish exporters increase exports into the Eurozone by 50% by 2020. The Eurozone will now be the first market for Enterprise Ireland backed exporters and EI will highlight priority sectors and encourage growth targets in areas like construction, engineering and the life sciences/medtech sectors.

There are three Enterprise Ireland offices serving Central and Eastern European markets, based in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest. EI has and will continue to have a strong policy of maintaining a flexible approach to the deployment of resources across international markets in line with changing market opportunities. This is reflected in the Agency's ability to open and close offices and to move resources across markets as required. In all cases, Enterprise Ireland's focus is on those markets that offer realisable commercial potential for our clients be it in the short, medium or long term.

Employment Support Services

199. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the supports given to a group (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28995/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The decision by the company concerned to close its operation in Leixlip was very disappointing. Finding a new investor for the facility, and creating or identifying alternative employment opportunities for those affected, remain key priorities for my Department and its Agencies.

My Department has also engaged with the Department of Social Protection (D/SP) to ensure all available supports are provided to the company's workers. I understand that D/SP has been in direct contact with the company regarding the entitlements of its staff.

Similarly, my Department has engaged as well with the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board - which has been in direct contact itself with the company - regarding an assessment of the skills profile of the affected staff. Re-training will be provided, if required, and every effort will be made to help workers transition and find new employment.

Departmental Staff Relocation

200. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff under the remit of her Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29041/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The number of my Department's staff who have notified my HR Unit of an application for a transfer to offices outside the Dublin region in the period 2014 to date is set out in tabular format below. This includes staff seeking to move from one of my Department's regional locations to another.

Year	Number of Officers who applied for transfers outside of Dublin	Number of Officers who transferred outside of Dublin
2014	7	6
2015	6	1
2016	5	6
2017	2	8
Total	20	21

The transfers approved were to fill business needs in respective areas of my Department, or other Departments/Agencies, and initiated at the request of the individual staff members concerned. There are therefore no additional costs incurred to my Department.

In respect of the State Agencies under the remit of my Department, although these are day to day matters for which I have no function, nonetheless, I have asked all Agencies to provide me with corresponding information in relation to their own staff and I will communicate that information to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

201. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will confirm a date to enable Dáil Éireann to have an opportunity to debate the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29050/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I believe that it is important to wait to see the benefits of the EU – Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) taking effect. We can then have a fully informed, evidence based debate on the value of the Agreement to Ireland. I would stress that following the recent Opinion 2/15 of the European Court of Justice on the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement there are no immediate plans to ratify CETA.

I fully support provisional application of the Agreement. I am of the view that there should be no impediment to Irish companies immediately taking advantage of the provisions of CETA including eliminating tariffs on almost all of key exports, access to the Canadian procurement market, easing regulatory barriers and ensuring more transparent rules for market access. The main provisions offering new opportunities for Irish business will be provisionally applied once Canada has completed its own procedures. It is expected that CETA will provisionally apply from summer 2017.

My Department will undertake a comprehensive study which will examine in depth the economic impact of existing and forthcoming EU Free Trade Agreements including CETA. The analysis from the study will inform the Department and relevant agencies in setting the policy framework required for Irish businesses to take full advantage of concluded trade agreements and preferential trade access, and to prepare for future opportunities. The study will also identify the impact of free trade agreements at sectorial level, especially on employment and output. The terms of reference for the study are currently being developed.

Disabled Drivers Grant Data

202. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications refused that subsequently were appealed to the disabled drivers medical board of appeal; and the number of refused applications that were submitted to the disabled drivers medical board of appeal and subsequently overturned and certificates granted, in tabular form. [28856/17]

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.

Customs and Excise Controls

203. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of meetings customs officials have had with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26551/17]

204. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of potential crossing points that have been identified on the border with Northern Ireland; if customs officials have conducted a survey of potential crossing points on the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26552/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

The Government's position in relation to the border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear and has been articulated by the Taoiseach on several occasions. Continued freedom of movement, absence of a "hard" border, and protection of the Good Friday Agreement are key objectives for the Irish Government. This is a position that is well heard and understood across the EU and is reflected in the EU's negotiating guidelines.

As set out in the guidelines, flexible and imaginative solutions will be required.

Our absolute preference is to maintain the closest possible trading relationship based on a level playing field between the UK and the EU, including Ireland.

There is a lot of negotiation yet to be done around trading arrangements and, by extension, any customs regime that might apply.

It is premature to set out detailed possible solutions, particularly when negotiations have yet to properly begin.

It is important that technical solutions do not anticipate or drive outcomes at a political level.

It is clear, however that the withdrawal of a Member State from the Union is a situation without any precedent, in either political or practical terms. That said we are looking at other border situations which may offer possible guidance on how we address the unique situation found on the island of Ireland.

The Revenue Commissioners, like all Government Agencies, are actively engaged in assessing the potential impact of Brexit and studying statistical information on 499 kilometers of border, 200+ crossings and 12 national roads to inform the full range of possibilities. As negotiations have yet to commence it is premature to presume the outcome and practical implications of Brexit.

In relation to the Deputy's questions, it would be premature for the Revenue Commissioners to identify locations for specific crossing points on or near the border with Northern Ireland in the context of post-Brexit arrangements. The Chairman of the Revenue Commissioners recently stated at his appearance at the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach that '... the operation of customs post Brexit and the resulting impact on business will be defined to a great extent by the terms of the Brexit agreement...' He affirmed that Revenue is not looking for sites for customs posts.

Since the UK's Brexit referendum, officers of the Revenue Commissioners have held 29 high-level and stakeholder engagements. Customs officials have not met with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) in relation to Brexit.

Brexit Issues

205. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated changes to capital gains tax receipts due to Brexit, specifically with regard to internal transfers between Irish and United Kingdom company groups that have a presence both here and in the United Kingdom and that would incur capital gains tax as a result of former internal transfers. [26553/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the details of intergroup transfers of assets are not separately identified on the relevant tax returns. The Deputy may also be interested to note that, in the majority of situations, tax on capital gains realised by corporate entities is reported with and paid as part of their Corporation Tax liability.

As such, there is no reliable basis upon which to estimate the changes, if any, to receipts in this regard with respect to Brexit.

Brexit Issues

206. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to conduct an outreach programme to ensure that all businesses are equipped to make the necessary decisions on customs in the context of preparations for Brexit; if an estimated start date has been set; the number of engagements targeted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26554/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that there is ongoing engagement with the business community through meetings with business/trade representative groups, attendance at various Brexit events throughout the country and at meetings of the Customs Consultative Committee (CCC), representing the logistics, import and export sectors. Up to the present, the engagement has been for the purpose of listening to the concerns

of business and advising on general customs matters.

There is a lot of negotiation yet to be done around trading arrangements and, by extension, any customs regime that might apply. It is premature to set out, or provide advice on the basis of detailed possible solutions, particularly when negotiations have yet to properly begin. It is important that technical solutions do not anticipate, or indeed drive, outcomes at a political level.

However, when there is more clarity about the likely outcome of Brexit negotiations, Revenue plan to conduct a general information campaign to assist businesses in assessing the likely customs impact on their business. In a second stage, businesses which appear from Revenue records to have trade with the UK will be canvassed directly, and given the opportunity to discuss their particular issues. Closer to the date of UK exit, an intensive programme of registration and authorisation will be undertaken to prepare businesses in detail for implementation of customs procedures.

European Investment Bank Loans

207. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the agreement to provide a precautionary lending plan for the State through the European Investment Bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26555/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): From the outset, I should make absolutely clear that Ireland does not have, nor has sought, a precautionary lending plan from any international body.

The Deputy may be referring to references to a possible precautionary line of credit through the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) at the time of our exit from the EU-IMF Programme of Assistance at the end of 2013. Again, Ireland did not request such a facility and made it clear at the time that we did not need or want it. Indeed the existence of such a facility could have negatively impacted on our successful return to the Bond markets in 2014.

Company Liquidations

208. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of outstanding claims with regard to a company (details supplied) awaiting payment in increments of €100,000, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26602/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Liquidator for Setanta has informed me that there are currently 320 claims ready for settlement and listed for inclusion in the next application for payment from the ICF which will shortly be reviewed by the State Claims Agency.

These include both personal injury and damage claims, and associated legal costs where applicable.

The range of values is as follows:

Claim Range	No. of Claims
€0 - €100,000	303
€100,000 - €200,000	9

Claim Range	No. of Claims
€200,000 - €300,000	3
€300,000 - €400,000	1
€400,000 +	4

The Liquidator has advised me that he is not in a position to provide a similar breakdown in respect of the remaining outstanding claims until such time as they have been prepared for settlement.

State Banking Sector

209. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the shareholding held by the State in a bank (details supplied); the details of each State trading transaction in the bank since 1 January 2011; and the date and nature of the transactions, for example, purchase or sale of ordinary shares, the amount of shares transacted and the finance involved. [26671/17]

210. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the value of the State's shareholding in a bank (details supplied). [26672/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 210 together.

In July 2011, the State purchased 13,123m units of ordinary shares as part of Bank of Ireland's rights issue. Each unit of stock cost 10 cent and the total cost to the State of this investment was €1,312m.

At the time of participating in the rights issue, it was always the intention to on-sell a substantial portion of this investment to a consortium of North American investors. Accordingly, the State sold 10,510m units of stock in two tranches – one in July 2011 and the second in October 2011. Both sales were at a price again of 10 cent per unit of stock generating total proceeds of €1,051m.

The State currently holds a 14% equity stake in the bank. Based on the Irish Stock Exchange's closing price, this stake had a market value of c. €1.1bn as at 31 May 2017.

Tax Reliefs Application

211. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance when a decision will issue from the Revenue Commissioners on an application for relief (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26691/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the application for relief referred to was first refused, by letter dated 19 May 2016, as the company was deemed not to be a qualifying new venture, as required under section 493(1)(d) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The trade existed as a sole trader prior to being incorporated as a company. This position was again notified to the company by letter dated 11 August 2016, by letter dated 28 December 2016 and again by letter dated 2 June 2017.

Trade Relations

212. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to make arrangements to ensure that companies here can trade with Iran and overcome restrictions on banking transactions in a manner which has been successfully done by most other European countries. [26745/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation that Enterprise Ireland has organised several trade delegations to Iran in 2016 and 2017, as well as facilitating Enterprise Ireland client companies to explore the potential of the Iranian market. Enterprise Ireland will take these activities further next month (July) with a seminar on doing business in Iran. In addition, it is also planning the organisation of additional and larger trade delegations to Iran.

Enterprise Ireland sees particular opportunities in the Iranian market for client companies active in Agricultural and Food Production Technologies, Pharmaceuticals, Food and Health-care. Another key sector is Aviation, as Iranian airlines are seeking to rapidly modernise their airliner fleet and have announced huge deals with Boeing, Airbus and Alenia for the purchase of upwards of 300 new aircraft. Many of these aircraft will be leased and as Ireland already has a pre-eminent role in global aviation leasing, opportunities should arise there for that sector.

The Deputy will be aware that, as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the European Council has lifted nuclear-related economic and financial EU sanctions concerning Iran although some EU restrictive measures still remain in place with respect to Iran regarding human rights violations. The JCPOA is considered a positive development which, it is hoped will allow Irish banks to review and possibly relax their risk assessments of services which facilitate funds transfers and receipts to and from Iran.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have informed me that since the implementation of the JCPOA, there has been a jump in EU-Iran trade and that banks across Europe are moving carefully into handling business with Iran again. While there is still some caution in all EU banks regarding the application of the new international rules, it is expected that banks in Ireland and in all member states will gain confidence as the situation continues to evolve.

It is important however for the Deputy to note that Banks are designated persons under the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010, and consequently have Anti-Money Laundering / Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) obligations to meet under that legislation. In meeting these obligations, banks are required to adopt a risk based approach as to how they conduct their business and who they conduct it with. I therefore have no role in influencing the risk tolerances banks should accept in this area and consequently cannot direct them as to what approach they should adopt.

Finally, my understanding is that Irish businesses and Irish banks are working to try and address this challenge. In this regard, officials of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation inform me that Irish exports to Iran amounted to some €76M in 2015 and that Iran is an important target market for State development agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia.

The Government will continue to monitor the situation.

Disabled Drivers Grant Eligibility

213. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the criteria used in processing an application for a primary medical certificate (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26786/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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.

With regard to the Motorised Transport Grant, I am informed by the Minister for Health that due to concerns following on from reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013. The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments which support choice and independence. In that regard, monthly pay-

ments of €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance at the time the scheme closed.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Minister for Health has informed me that work on the policy proposals in this regard is at an advanced stage and he anticipates that this will be brought to Government shortly.

Insurance Levy

214. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he will take to ensure no additional levies will be charged to cover the cost of the recent court ruling regarding an insurance company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26813/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The failure of Setanta Insurance and the uncertainty that followed over the compensation arrangements for claimants created doubts around the current insurance compensation framework which has now been clarified by the Supreme Court.

However, there has been a general view that consideration should be given to ensuring 100% third party payments in any future motor insurance insolvencies, whatever the outcome of the Setanta appeals process.

This led to the Review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation in Ireland – a report which was issued by a Joint Working Group led by the Department of Finance and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in June 2016. It recommended that the level of cover for third party motor insurance claims should be increased from 65% to 100% and that while the ICF will pay out the amount due in full, it will receive from industry a contribution to cover the additional 35%. To meet this 35% contribution, industry has proposed the establishment of an ex-ante fund into which they would make a contribution equivalent to 2% of gross motor insurance premiums. Such a fund once built up would allow them meet their obligations.

This approach will ensure that industry shares the burden of the additional costs associated with increasing the level of coverage of the ICF and at the same time it creates predictability and certainty for industry as to their exposure for financing insolvencies. It also maintains the attractiveness of Ireland for new entrants. This approach will allow companies the option to choose to absorb this additional cost i.e. to finance this contribution through absorbing it themselves fully or partly as an alternative to passing it onto consumers.

It is intended that Heads of a Bill to amend the Insurance Act 1964 will be brought to Government for approval by the end of this month.

Motor Insurance Coverage

215. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that insurance companies are refusing to offer persons a quote on the basis they have not been driving long enough or consistently enough despite the person having had a full driving licence for ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26828/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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.

I am advised that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. These factors may include the level and consistency of driving experience, and how recent such driving experience is. Other factors include the age and the type of car, as well as the age, claims record and penalty points of the driver, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result the price and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

Finally the Deputy should note that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Insurance Ireland can be contacted at feedback@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Motor Insurance Coverage

216. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that insurance companies are giving non-eligibility under acceptance criteria as the reason for their refusal to insure a vehicle for a person without stating specific details for refusal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26829/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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.

It should be noted that the Central Bank is responsible for the day to day supervision of the insurance industry. In that regard, it has two specific mandates. Firstly, it is responsible for the prudential supervision of insurance companies it has authorised by seeking to ensure that such firms remain solvent. Secondly, it is responsible for the supervision of conduct of business in Ireland, also referred to as consumer protection.

In relation to your question, the Central Bank of Ireland has informed me that its Consumer Protection Code includes rules relating to the provision of information to consumers by regulated firms.

Provision 2.6 of Chapter 2 (General Principles) requires that a regulated entity must ensure that, in all its dealings with customers and within the context of its authorisation, it makes full disclosure of all relevant material information, including all charges, in a way that seeks to inform the customer.

In the context of this question, Provision 4.39 of the Consumer Protection Code is particularly relevant and provides as follows:

“Where an insurance undertaking refuses to quote a consumer for a motor or property insurance, it must, within five business days of the refusal:

1. In the case of motor insurance, provide the consumer with its refusal its reason for refusing cover, on paper or another durable medium, and notify the consumer of their right to refer the matter to the Declined Cases Committee and the method of doing so.”

The Central Bank of Ireland also informed me that it “expects that when an insurer provides a reason for refusal to quote a consumer for motor insurance in accordance with Provision 4.39, it does so in a way that seeks to inform the consumer”.

The Deputy should note that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Insurance Ireland will also provide further information in respect of the Declined Cases Agreement and can be contacted at feedback@insuranceireland.eu or declined@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Tax Code

217. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners were notified of a feed price increase by a processor in the poultry sector prior to that processor proceeding with the increase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26836/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that traders are not required to notify them of their prices or of any changes to their prices and that generally there is no legal basis for price controls in Ireland. They have also informed me that they are well aware of claims that the interaction of the flat rate scheme for farmers and the normal VAT system can under certain circumstances be exploited to generate a systematic excess of flat rate payments to unregistered farmers over the VAT borne by them on their input costs.

I made provision in Finance Act 2016 for the exclusion by Ministerial Order of a sector from the flat rate scheme where the use of certain business structures and/or contractual arrangements within a particular sector result in a systematic excess of the amount of flat-rate addition payments over the amount of non-recoverable tax on input costs.

Revenue are currently reviewing business structures and models operating in the poultry sector and are carrying out a number of enquiries on farmers, processors and other parties including special purpose vehicles operating within this sector. The purpose of these enquiries is to examine whether or not there are business models, practices or special contractual arrangements in place that are giving rise to an excess of flat-rate addition payments over non-recoverable VAT input costs and the future plans of those parties in light of the new legislative provision.

If this examination of the poultry sector concludes that there is systematic overcompensation of unregistered farmers, the Ministerial Order is an available action. You might recall from the Dail debate on this provision that many Deputies asked that the industry be given time to restructure its operations and I acceded to this request and undertook not to make such an order until the latter part of 2017.

Tax Reliefs Data

218. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if there has been an audit of the tax

relief at source, TRS, scheme since its establishment in 2002 in regard to the operation of the TRS scheme; and, if so, the person or body that conducted the audit. [26840/17]

219. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have audited the methodology used by banks to apply tax relief at source to the funding account (details supplied). [26841/17]

220. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners apply an agreed definition of funding account; and the location this definition can be found. [26842/17]

221. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the amount the tracker redress scandal has cost the State to date as a result of tax relief at source payments being applied incorrectly to the higher interest that was applied to these mortgages. [26843/17]

222. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners has the power to investigate and to compel the bank to pay the tax relief at source in full in cases in which a shortfall arises between the value of TRS paid by the Revenue Commissioners to a bank and the value of TRS received by the mortgage holder from the bank. [26844/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 to 222, inclusive, together.

Mortgage interest relief is administered through the Tax Relief at Source (TRS) system. The relief is applied by the lenders based on information provided by Revenue, which is sourced from the borrower's application.

Revenue carries out regular compliance checks on the lenders to ensure correct operation of the mortgage interest relief scheme. Additionally, all information in regard to the operation of the scheme is made available to the Comptroller & Auditor General for examination.

There is no set definition in the legislation of 'funding account' but a common understanding of the term is the account from which the mortgage payments are made by the borrower.

Revenue is currently in discussions with the lending institutions to quantify the full amount of mortgage interest relief to be repaid on foot of the tracker redress programme. While the exact amount is not yet fully quantified, €2.8m has already been repaid to Revenue and it is expected that the remaining amounts will be recovered.

Under Section 244A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 Revenue can request a lender to provide information in relation to any qualifying mortgage loan in order to verify that the correct relief was applied and the lender must comply with the request within thirty days. On the rare occasion where a shortfall is identified Revenue will pay the amount due directly to the borrower.

Finally, Revenue has assured me that it always follows up with financial institutions in regard to any complaints or queries received from mortgage holders. If the Deputy has concerns or information in relation to the allocation method being used by a particular lender I would ask that she immediately informs Revenue so that the issue can be quickly investigated.

Revenue Commissioners Investigations

223. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the appeals process open to a person who has gone through all stages of mediation with the Revenue Commissioners and

revenue sheriffs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26874/17]

224. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid to Revenue sheriffs by persons that decided to purchase back assets that were the subject of a warrant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26875/17]

225. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of warrants issued for the collection of debts owed to the Revenue Commissioners by Revenue sheriffs in the past five years and to date in 2017, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26879/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 to 225, inclusive, together.

Revenue only refers outstanding tax liabilities to its enforcement agents, including Sheriffs, as a last resort. Before any such action is taken Revenue makes every effort to engage with the taxpayer and where possible will agree a mutually acceptable payment arrangement as an alternative. Revenue's ongoing commitment in this regard is clearly evidenced by the 10,886 phased payment arrangements that were agreed in 2016 in respect of €103m of debt.

In regard to Question 26874, where a tax debt is referred to a Sheriff, the taxpayer is entitled to expect all engagement to be conducted in accordance with the Sheriffs' Code of Practice. Where the taxpayer feels that this has not happened he/she is entitled to request a review by the Joint Steering Committee (JSC), which is also provided for in the Sheriffs' Code of Practice. The JSC includes a representative from the Department for Justice and Equality (Chair), a representative from Revenue and representatives from the Sheriffs' Association.

If the taxpayer is still dissatisfied at the end of JSC process he/she is fully entitled to have the issue heard before the Courts. It is important to note that Sheriffs are officers of the Court and as such are not accountable to Revenue for their debt collection activities. They are however governed by the general law, which applies to the collection of civil debts and are answerable before the Courts for any breach of these laws.

In regard to Question 26875, Sheriffs only seize goods in a very small number of cases. In such circumstances the taxpayer is provided with a full inventory of the goods seized and is allowed a further period of time to engage with the Sheriff before the items are sold. The items are returned to the taxpayer if the tax debt is subsequently paid or if an acceptable payment arrangement is agreed. Where the items are sold, the Sheriff provides the taxpayer with a full account of the proceeds of the sale including details on costs and the actual amount paid to Revenue. Revenue does not hold data in relation to seizure activity by the Sheriffs and is not aware of instances where a defaulting taxpayer 'purchases back assets' seized by the Sheriff in the manner suggested by the Deputy.

The following table provides a county breakdown of the number of warrants issued by Revenue to the Sheriffs for the years 2012 to 2017 (year to date) as requested by the Deputy in Question 26879.

Sheriff Warrants 2012 to January-April 2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Jan - Apr 2017
County	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Carlow	377	378	441	378	417	144
Cavan	547	517	437	369	504	217

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Jan - Apr 2017
County	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.	No.
Clare	1,023	1,080	1,019	713	994	349
Cork	3,518	2,802	3,051	3,223	4,184	1565
Donegal	807	743	796	733	1,057	388
Dublin	8,775	8,361	9,511	8,596	10,724	4015
Galway	1,701	1,189	1,201	1,198	1,595	869
Kerry	1,325	1,378	1,353	923	1,105	442
Kildare	1,482	1,383	1,454	1,477	1,571	636
Kilkenny	463	462	551	536	551	264
Laois	327	299	397	391	449	195
Leitrim	214	172	196	195	301	105
Limerick	998	1,517	1,595	1,330	1,821	578
Longford	255	233	242	227	367	124
Louth	1,114	1,021	903	1,059	1,458	447
Mayo	682	835	938	696	872	319
Meath	1,261	1,074	1,191	1,263	1,935	701
Monaghan	519	444	354	309	428	207
Offaly	318	252	361	276	308	185
Roscommon	337	193	281	229	392	179
Sligo	444	408	436	396	468	150
Tipperary	1,250	918	1,064	923	920	411
Waterford	772	672	628	646	738	247
Westmeath	561	405	570	520	593	304
Wexford	808	750	726	827	1,425	432
Wicklow	1,187	1,309	1,231	1,044	1,455	437
Total	31,065	28,795	30,927	28,477	36,632	13,910

Tax Reliefs Data

226. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the names of each donor who received tax relief for donations of heritage items under section 176 of the Finance Act of 1995 and section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in each of the years 1995 to 2015. [26889/17]

229. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance the schemes offered by his Department that allow for benefits to persons, organisations or companies in the form of a tax break or direct grant to support items of arts, heritage, cultural or regional importance; the amount of money which has been granted or allowed to these schemes in each of the past five years; and the persons, organisations or companies involved. [26918/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 226 and 229 together.

My Department does not provide direct grants to support items of arts, heritage, cultural or regional importance. In relation to tax expenditures, the following measures are in place:

1. Section 195 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 covers the exemption of certain earnings of writers, composers and artists (commonly known as the artists' exemption). This scheme provides for an exemption of up to €50,000 per annum from the income earned by an individual from their artistic works, where it has been determined by Revenue that the works are original and creative and are generally recognised as having cultural or artistic merit.

The scheme provides that Revenue can make determinations in respect of artistic works in the following categories only:

- a book or other writing
- a play
- a musical composition
- a painting or other like picture
- a sculpture

2. Section 482 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 was introduced for the purpose of assisting the preservation of our built heritage, by giving tax relief to the owners or occupiers of significant buildings or gardens on the expenditure incurred by them on the repair, maintenance and restoration of those properties.

This scheme applies to an approved building, an approved garden existing independently, or an approved object contained within the house or garden, to which reasonable access is afforded to the public or where the building is a guest house approved by Fáilte Ireland.

A building or garden must receive a determination from the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to the effect that it is a building or garden which is intrinsically of significant horticultural, scientific, historical, architectural or aesthetic interest, before it can qualify for tax relief.

3. Section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (previously section 176 of the Finance Act of 1995) provides for the payment of tax by means of donation of heritage items. The scheme provides that where a heritage item is donated to an approved body that a tax credit equivalent to 80% of the market value of the item is available to the donor to be set against any arrears of tax from prior years, any current liabilities, with the remaining balance being available to set against any future liabilities.

For the purpose of Section 1003, heritage item means any kind of cultural item including -

- any archaeological item, archive, book, estate record, manuscript and painting, and
- any collection of cultural items and any collection of such items in their setting,

which is -

- an outstanding example of the type of item involved, pre-eminent in its class, whose export from the State would diminish the accumulated heritage of Ireland or whose import would enhance the accumulated heritage of Ireland, and

- suitable for acquisition by an approved body.

Donations may be made to the following approved bodies

- The National Archives

- The National Gallery of Ireland
- The National Library of Ireland
- The National Museum of Ireland
- The Crawford Art Gallery Cork Ltd
- The Irish Museum of Modern Art

- Any other body owned or funded by the State or by any public or local authority as may be approved, with the consent of the Minister for Finance, by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

A detailed list of all heritage donations made since 1995 to date is available at <http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/app/uploads/2016/12/donations-1995-to-date.pdf>.

The Annual Reports of the Revenue Commissioners also show the items donated in each year and are available at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/press-office/annual-report/index.aspx>.

4. Section 1003A provides for the payment of tax by means of donation of heritage property to the Irish Heritage Trust or the Commissioners of Public Works. The scheme provides that where an approved heritage property is donated that a tax credit equivalent to 50% of the market value of the item is available to the donor to be set against any arrears of tax from prior years, any current liabilities, with the remaining balance being available to set against any future liabilities.

There has only been one donation made under this scheme in recent years. In 2015, Annes Grove Demesne, valued at €1,750,000 was donated to the Commissioners of Public Works.

Revenue has provided the following statistics in relation to the schemes. No statistics are available, as yet, in relation to the cost of the property donation made under section 1003A.

Year	Artists Exemption (Section 195)		Expenditure on approved buildings (Section 482)		Donation of heritage items (Section 1003)	
	Cost (€m)	Claimants	Cost (€m)	Claimants	Cost (€m)	Claimants
2010	9.6	2,350	3.9	140	0.2	3
2011	5.5	2,520	3	150	1.4	1
2012	4.8	2,490	2.1	110	0.1	1
2013	5.3	2,580	2.1	120	0.3	1
2014*	5.8	2,640	2.8	150	0.13	1

* Last year for which figures are available.

I am further informed by Revenue that for reasons of taxpayer confidentiality they cannot provide information on the persons, organisations or companies who have availed of relief under these schemes.

227. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26903/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare, at Government level, a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

The Department of Finance has been assessing and preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016. Work was carried out in the Department to assess the potential economic and financial sector implications arising, including the study, published in November 2015, under the ESRI-Department of Finance research programme, entitled 'Scoping the Possible Economic Implications of Brexit on Ireland'. The Department's work has been carried out within the whole-of-Government arrangements overseen by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Since the UK referendum, preparation has intensified across the whole of Government level, including in my own Department, where a Brexit Unit was established in July 2016, within the EU and International Division, to oversee and coordinate this work and to act as a key liaison point with the Department of the Taoiseach, in particular. In addition, the Department of Finance staff complement in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels has been strengthened. The challenge which we face as a result of Brexit is mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning. The ongoing work in the Department of Finance continues to examine all scenarios, including the scenario of the UK leaving the EU without an agreement in place.

We know from our own published research that the potential impact on the Irish economy is significant. The medium to long term economic impacts of a 'hard Brexit' with reversion to the WTO trade rules are set out in the November 2016 joint paper with the ESRI 'Modelling the potential macroeconomic Impact of Brexit on Ireland'. Looking at the effect ten years after a UK exit, a hard Brexit scenario results in the level of GDP being almost 4 per cent below what it otherwise would have been in a no-Brexit scenario.

At the time of Budget 2017, the Department published detailed analysis of sectorial exposure to Brexit across the economy. This showed that the sectors most impacted by Brexit are generally small scale indigenous enterprises, with high levels of regional employment and relatively low profit levels that are highly linked to the rest of the economy. Ireland's exposure to the UK is not isolated to the indigenous sectors, with, for example, pharmaceutical manufacturing, financial and ICT services having a substantial export relationship with the UK. Certain

other services sectors such as the indigenous Tourism and Hospitality sector (which is heavily dependent on UK tourists) are equally exposed to the competitiveness challenges posed by currency movements. In line with this sectorial analysis, Budget 2017 contained a number of measures which were a first step to support our economic response to the challenges of Brexit.

It is important to recognise that the full impact of the UK's exit is only expected to materialise over time. We are at the beginning of a negotiation period and the precise arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK.

Work being done by the Department will be an important input to ensuring that Ireland will be in a position to counter negative economic impacts arising from Brexit, to ensure that Ireland's interests are protected in the upcoming negotiations at EU level and also to seek to maximise opportunities arising in the financial services sector. The Department will continue to monitor the economic impacts, to carry out the necessary analysis and to frame budgetary policy advice in this context.

Mortgage Schemes

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if the 1991 code of practice on the transfer of mortgages and section 117 of the Central Bank Act 1989 has been effectively revoked or amended in legislation in order to render either piece of information as inoperable. [26915/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Code of Practice on the Transfer of Mortgages is a voluntary code which was issued by the Central Bank of Ireland in 1991 to institutions involved in mortgage credit.

The Code of Practice on the Transfer of Mortgages states that it applies to a loan secured by the mortgage of residential property. For the purposes of this Code of Practice, residential property is not limited to principal private residences. This Code of Practice can be applied on a voluntary basis by any institution involved in mortgage credit. A copy of the Code is available at <https://www.centralbank.ie/regulation/consumer-protection/other-codes-of-conduct>

Section 117 of the Central Bank Act 1989 has not been revoked and is still in force. Indeed, Section 117 was amended in 2004 by Schedule 3, Part 7 Amendment of Central Bank Act 1989 (Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act 2004 (No. 21)), however this amendment did not in any way render the legislation "inoperable".

For further information, I refer the Deputy to the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013, which introduced a more assertive supervisory approach and overhauled the Central Bank's powers across a wide range of areas and throughout the regulatory life cycle of firms. It strengthened the ability of the Central Bank to impose and supervise compliance with regulatory requirements and to undertake timely assertive prudential interventions. The Act also provided the Central Bank with greater access to information and analysis and underpins the credible enforcement of financial services legislation in line with international best practice. Section 48 of the 2013 Act gives the Central Bank the power to make regulations for the proper and effective regulation of regulated financial service providers. Borrowers have regulatory protections under various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation in July 2016.

Question No. 229 answered with Question No. 226.

Banking Operations

230. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 100 of 24 May 2017, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a bank (details supplied) appears to have changed its interpretation of IAS 39, a standard which was heavily criticised during the recent bank inquiry but was nevertheless used by to hide losses in the past; if the bank has since corrected its interpretation of IAS 39 in order that in the forthcoming prospectus the bank will never value assets at above the value the bank expects to recover; the date the bank altered its views on IAS 39; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that similar attempts by a bank (details supplied) to exploit IAS 39 resulted in a lengthy court battle which cost the bank £100 million in legal fees and resulted in the bank paying substantial compensation to shareholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26922/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I stated in response to the Deputy's previous PQ, 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. The International Accounting Standard that the deputy's question refers to was released by the International Accountancy Standards Board (IASB) and is adopted across the EU and internationally. AIB produces detailed, externally audited accounts in line with international accounting best practice.

AIB have provided the following comment:

“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.

AIB has not changed its interpretation of IAS39 and has applied it consistently.”

I have no responsibility for the second bank referred to by the Deputy in her question. That bank is regulated in a foreign jurisdiction. I cannot therefore comment on its affairs.

Stamp Duty

231. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of leases in each of the past five years for which figures are available on which stamp duty on residential leases has been paid at the 1% rate; the yield on this in each of these years; the specific statutory basis for the current exemption threshold of €30,000; the basis on which this has been set at this level; the date it was last altered; the previous threshold applying; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26932/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a lease for property is subject to Stamp Duty on both the premium and the rent. The rate of duty on

the premium for all residential leases mirrors the rate applicable to conveyances for residential property, for the years in question this being 1% on the first €1 million, and 2% on any excess over €1 million. The rate on the average yearly rent is 1% for a term not exceeding 35 years or for any indefinite term, and 6% for a term exceeding 35 years but not exceeding 100 years. Where a lease is for any indefinite term, it is treated as a lease for a deemed fixed period of one year, the lease growing each year by a further year. A rate of 12% of the average annual rent applies where the length of the lease exceeds 100 years. It is assumed that the Deputy is referring to residential leases not exceeding 35 years or for any indefinite term.

Residential leases for a term not exceeding 35 years or any indefinite term where the rent does not exceed €30,000 per annum are exempt from Stamp Duty. The legislative basis for this exemption is contained within the Lease head of charge in Schedule 1 of the Stamp Duty Consolidation Act 1999. This exemption threshold was last amended by s. 125(1)(c) of the Finance Act 2008, where previously the threshold was €19,050.

The available Stamp Duty data identifies short term leases on residential property which would include residential leases not exceeding 35 years or any leases for any indefinite term where rent exceeds €30,000 per year (liable to a rate of 1%) and leases for a term exceeding 35 years but not exceeding 100 years (liable to a rate of 6%). It is not possible to provide a breakdown between the classes of lease. The table below shows the number of, and yield from, short term leases on residential property. Data for 2012 and earlier years are not available.

Residential Short Term Lease Less than or equal to 100 years

Year	Number	Duty €m
2013	80	0.05
2014	140	0.07
2015	178	0.09
2016	238	0.15

Legislative Measures

232. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the outstanding measures introduced under various Finance Acts which are subject to European Union approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26933/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed that the only provision for which EU approval is outstanding is relief for certain leases of farmland found in section 81D SDCA 1999, which was introduced by section 74 Finance Act 2014. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are liaising with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG Agri) in respect of obtaining approval for this provision.

Tax Code

233. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he has taken to eliminate aggressive tax planning indicators since December 2015; if he has advised the tax authorities of other member states; if information regarding these structures form part of the information the State is bound to exchange with other EU countries since 1 January 2017; if other EU member states have taken action to eliminate these facilitators of aggressive tax planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26947/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand the question refers to a working paper entitled ‘Study on Structures of Aggressive Tax Planning and Indicators’ that was prepared by consultants and published by the European Commission in December 2015. The Study highlights features of the tax regimes in each EU Member State that, in the view of the authors, could potentially be indicators of aggressive tax planning.

The study is a piece of academic work and therefore there is no mechanism for the exchanging of information by Member States in relation to the report. I am not aware of any specific action taken by other Member States directly on foot of this study. The significant action that has been taken by Ireland, and other Member States, since 2015 to tackle aggressive tax planning has focussed on implementing the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) recommendations, which were agreed in October 2015.

Ireland is fully committed to implementing these recommendations and this process began with the implementation of Country by Country Reporting in Finance Act 2015. We have also fully implemented OECD exchange of information requirements in respect of tax rulings as agreed in BEPS Action 5.

The EU’s Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive, which was agreed in June 2016, represented a significant further step towards the implementation of the BEPS recommendations. The Directive will see three of the other key OECD BEPS recommendations implemented across Europe. These are rules targeting hybrid mismatches, interest deductibility rules and Controlled Foreign Company rules. Ireland will implement these changes in line with agreed deadlines set out in the Directive.

Most recently, the BEPS Multilateral Instrument was signed by Ireland and 67 other countries in Paris on 7 June. The Multilateral Instrument will provide the mechanism for extensive changes to tax treaties globally. It will ensure that tax treaties are updated to reflect a number of important OECD BEPS actions, including agreed standards on treaty shopping and dispute resolution.

We expect the European Commission to shortly publish a draft Directive requiring the disclosure of aggressive tax schemes in line with a BEPS recommendation. Ireland already has such rules and will engage with other Member States to ensure that we can agree a Directive which faithfully implements the OECD BEPS recommendation in this area. This Directive is likely to include a mechanism to automatically exchange information in relation to any aggressive tax structures devised and reported by tax advisers.

Finally, the review by an independent expert of Ireland’s corporation tax code which is currently underway will include consideration of what further actions Ireland may need to take to ensure we are fully compliant with the OECD BEPS recommendations.

Tax Code

234. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the structures in the tax code that were used to arrive at a tax ruling (details supplied) enabling the company to lower the tax it owed the State to as little as 0.005%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26949/17]

237. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the structures in the tax code which were used to arrive at a tax ruling in relation to a company (details supplied) enabling it to lower the tax it owed here to as little as 0.005%; and if these structures are still in place or are being used in other tax rulings. [27037/17]

238. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will make a statement in relation to obligations regarding information in relation to structures in the tax code which were used to arrive at the tax ruling with regard to a company (details supplied); and if this is part of the information Ireland is bound to exchange with other EU countries since 1 January 2017. [27038/17]

285. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the structures in the tax code which were used to allow a company (details supplied) to lower the tax it owed here to as little as 0.005%; if these structures are still in place; if they are being utilised by other companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27810/17]

286. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if information regarding the tax structures that allowed a company (details supplied) to pay extremely low tax here form part of the information that Ireland is bound to exchange with other EU countries since 1 January 2017; if other EU member states have taken action to eliminate these facilitators of aggressive tax planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27811/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234, 237, 238, 285 and 286 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that under Irish tax law, non-resident companies are chargeable to Irish corporation tax only on the profits attributable to their Irish branches. The profits of non-resident companies that are not generated by their Irish branches – such as profits from technology, design and marketing that are generated outside Ireland – cannot be charged with Irish tax under Irish tax law. The trading income of an Irish branch of a non-resident company is charged at the statutory 12.5% rate of corporation tax.

The very low rates frequently cited in relation to multinational companies with branch operations in Ireland are derived by presenting the tax paid in Ireland by these non-resident companies, which are only liable to Irish tax on the income of their Irish branch, as a percentage of the global profits of such global companies – which is misleading as most of the global profit is not chargeable to Irish tax. Such percentages do not compare like with like, i.e. the Irish tax with the Irish income.

The issue of international tax planning, involving mismatches between different countries' tax rules, is well known. Such mismatches, which can result in substantial profits escaping tax, necessarily involve the misalignment of the respective rules of *two* countries and, accordingly, are not the sole responsibility of either of the countries concerned. Nevertheless, consistent with Ireland's support for the OECD's BEPS Project to restrict the scope for international tax planning by multinational companies, when Ireland's *management and control*-based company tax residence rules were identified as contributing to mismatches with countries that based company tax residence solely on *place of incorporation*, amending legislation was enacted without delay in the Finance Act 2013 to prevent such mismatches.

Accordingly, the Finance Act 2013 eliminated the mismatch of national rules which allowed an Irish-incorporated company that was managed and controlled in a treaty-partner country such as the United States not to be tax-resident in either country. Where a company became tax-resident in Ireland as a result of this legislative change, any opinion in relation to attribution of income to an Irish branch of a non-resident company ceased to be relevant.

With regard to the actions of other EU Member States, I would highlight that Member States have responded collectively to the issue of aggressive international tax planning by adopting a number of legislative instruments over the past 24 months including a specific Anti Tax Avoidance Directive (2016/1164/EU) as well as a number of amendments to extend the scope of the

Directive on Administrative Cooperation (2011/16/EU) – which provides for exchange of tax information between Member States – to include tax rulings and country-by-country reporting. These are important steps in efforts to combat aggressive tax planning across Europe.

The EU exchange of information requirements, as set out in the amended Directive on Administrative Cooperation, apply to rulings provided since 2012, which would include Revenue opinions provided in 2012 and later years. The Deputies' questions refer to pre-2012 opinions which, accordingly, fall outside the scope of the exchange of information requirements provided by the amended Directive, as agreed by Member States.

Pensions Data

235. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26972/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Of the eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department, I have been advised that in eight bodies, there are no pension contributions made by public sector workers including the pension levy in the years requested. These are the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, the Financial Services Ombudsman Council, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Social Finance Foundation and the Tax Appeals Commissioner.

With respect to the Credit Review Office, office staff are seconded from Enterprise Ireland and as this is a body under the aegis of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, any pension contributions are a matter for that Department.

With respect to the Investor Compensation Company Limited (ICCL), staff are seconded from the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI), processed through the CBI payroll and subject to the CBI pension scheme. In this regard, please refer to Central Bank of Ireland data in the table.

Details of pension contributions made by public sector workers, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years requested and to date in 2017 in the remaining bodies are detailed in the table below.

Body	The figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017
Central Bank	2010: 7.7m 2011: 9.1m 2012: 10.3m 2013: 10.4m 2014: 10.2m 2015: 10.4m 2016: 10.7m 2017 to date: 3.6m

Body	The figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	2010, 2011 & 2012 – NIL 2013: €6,737.52 2014: €26,012.90 2015: €28,831.04 2016: €26,508.15 2017: €3,660.20 (ReBo is being wound down at present with only 2 staff members remaining, both of whom will finish up at end of July following the dissolution of ReBo. All staff members were employed on contract basis for the lifetime of ReBo).
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	2010: 190,315 2011: 236,236 2012: 220,127 2013: 238,164 2014: 225,452 2015: 197,447 2016*: 190,924 2017*: 83,169 *2016 / 2017 figures unaudited; 2017 to end May
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation	There were four pension schemes in place at the date of the appointment of the Special Liquidators. Three of the schemes were wound up in the weeks following the appointment and the fourth scheme was wound up on 16 March 2016. Following the decision to wind up the remaining scheme effective from 11 March 2016, current IBRC employees were offered the opportunity to make contributions to a Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA). The employee contributions since the appointment of the Special Liquidators are as follows: 2013: Employee Contribution €1,747,618 2014: Employee Contribution €801,578 2015: Employee Contribution €428,961 2016: Employee Contribution €136,436 2017: (up to 30 April) Employee Contribution €4,369 Note: The information provided is for the period from 2013 to date. Information prior to the appointment of the Special Liquidator in 2013 is not readily available and the compilation of this information would incur a significant expense given that all legacy systems are no longer operational.
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	2011: €6,563.19 2012: €3,683.26 2013: €3,962.44 2014: €19,312.98 2015: €22,814.93 2016: €16,713.39 2017 (up to May 2017): €10,172.98.
National Treasury Management Agency	2010: €2,222,499.93 2011: €2,919,248.56 2012: €3,382,212.91 2013: €3,828,967.24 2014: €4,635,784.11 2015: €5,000,422.91 2016: €4,659,122.70 2017 (to May): €2,017,152.84 *The National Treasury Management Agency assigns staff to the National Asset Management Agency and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

Questions - Written Answers
Tax Clearance Certificates

236. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to issuing a tax clearance certificate in respect of a person now deceased (details supplied). [27014/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that they are awaiting a response to their letter of 19 April 2017 to the agents in the matter. Once the information sought is provided then the matter can be progressed by Revenue.

Questions Nos. 237 and 238 answered with Question No. 234.

Central Bank of Ireland Reports

239. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the official financial and macroeconomic statistics published by the Central Bank that his Department has access to prior to official publication; the formal applications that have been made to the Central Bank by his Department for prior access to such statistics outside of those to which it routinely is given prior access since 1 January 2011. [27087/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Statistics Division of the Central Bank provides embargoed statistical publications on mortgage arrears, ‘Residential Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions Statistics’, and SME lending, ‘Trends in Business Credit and Deposits’ pre-publication to the Department of Finance on request.

These publications are provided on an embargoed basis as my Department prepares a submission on their contents for my information.

Property Tax Administration

240. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if persons that earn under the statutory rate of income can have the local property tax deducted from their disability allowance weekly payments of €193.00 in view of the fact that persons are forced to pay it at a post office must also pay the €1 fee for each monthly transaction leaving them €12 per annum worse off on a €90 charge as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27113/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The concept of a ‘de minimis’ welfare payment from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) is enshrined in social welfare legislation. The current ‘de minimis’ threshold is set at €191 per week and Revenue has no authority to arrange Local Property Tax (LPT) deductions that reduce a person’s payment below this amount.

In cases where LPT cannot be deducted from DSP payments, there are other phased payment options available to assist property owners in spreading the liability over the course of the year. These options include monthly Direct Debits through banks and certain credit union accounts and flexible payments through four approved Payment Service Providers including An Post, Payzone, Omnivend and PayPoint. Each of these service providers applies various transaction charges that are outside of Revenue’s control.

Revenue has already discussed the DSP related ‘de minimis’ limitations with the person in question and has outlined the various other payment options that exist for LPT. Having consid-

ered the options the person has decided to meet their 2017 liability through one of the approved Payment Service Providers.

The person is fully aware of the associated transaction costs and understands that they are outside of Revenue's control. To assist the person in reducing the transaction costs Revenue has advised them that it is fully acceptable to make monthly rather than weekly payments for the remainder of the year.

The person has also been provided with a direct telephone contact should he require any further assistance or have any other queries.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

241. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the tax treatment of Irish REIT shares which are given as share based remuneration to employees of Irish REITs. [27116/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Where an Irish REIT gives shares in that company as remuneration to its employees, the shares are taxable as perquisites under section 112 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 and they are treated the same as shares in any company that are awarded or given to its employees. The shares are also liable to USC and employee PRSI.

Where an employer awards shares to an employee free or at a discount, they are taxed within the PAYE system. The value of any shares awarded, or the value of any discount, is treated as notional pay at the time the shares are given to the employee. The related income tax, USC and PRSI liability is remitted by the employer company with the relevant P30 return.

Any dividend income from the shares is liable to tax under Schedule F and, if the shares are disposed of, any gain made is liable to Capital Gains Tax in the normal way.

The Deputy will be aware that there are a number of Revenue approved employee financial participation schemes, which provide limited income tax relief, such as approved profit sharing schemes and savings-related share option schemes. These are available to all Irish employer companies, including an Irish REIT.

Real Estate Investment Trusts

242. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if non-resident shareholders in Irish REITs are not subject to capital gains tax upon disposal of their shareholding provided that there is an uplift in the value of their REIT shares. [27117/17]

243. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the anti-avoidance measures which would prohibit a person from changing to a non-resident in order to avoid capital gains tax upon disposal of their shareholding provided there is an uplift in the value of their REIT shares. [27118/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 and 243 together.

I am advised by Revenue that if a non-resident shareholder disposes of his or her shares in an Irish REIT, there is no charge to capital gains tax in accordance with section 29 Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997.

Typically, non-resident persons are chargeable to capital gains tax on disposals of relevant assets. Those assets include land and buildings situated in this country (including unquoted shares which derive their value or the greater part of their value from such assets), minerals in this country or any rights, interests or other assets in relation to mining or minerals or the searching for minerals and assets associated with a trade carried on in this country through a branch or agency.

As REITs are publicly listed real estate companies and quoted shares are excluded from the definition of relevant assets under section 29 TCA, there is no charge to capital gains tax for non-resident shareholders disposing of their shareholding in an Irish REIT.

Section 29A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 is designed to counter the avoidance of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) by individuals who become temporarily non-resident for tax purposes by providing that certain assets disposed of by an individual in any year of non-residence are deemed to have been disposed of and reacquired at their market value on the last day of the year in which the individual left the State to reside elsewhere, thus imposing a CGT charge.

However, this charge will only arise where the individual is not taxable in the State for a period of 5 years or less before again becoming so taxable and only to the extent that he disposes of those assets during that period and was domiciled in Ireland prior to departure.

The assets concerned are a holding of the issued share capital in any company (wherever located) with a value of either 5% or more of all that company's issued share capital or exceeding €500,000.

For disposals made on or after 23 December 2014, where there is an increase or a decrease in the market value of assets between the last day of the year of departure and the date those assets are disposed of, the market value of the assets on the date they were disposed of will be treated as their market value for the purpose of the CGT charge.

Tax Yield

244. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue from tapering out the pay as you earn tax credit, the earned income tax credit and the single personal tax credit, that is no taper for married portion credit entitlements of €1,650, credits by 0.02% per €1,000 on individual income between €100,000 and €150,000 per year resulting in no entitlement to these tax credits when income is in excess of €150,000 and introducing a USC levy of 2%, 3%, 4% and 5% respectively on all income over €150,000. [27119/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the following table sets out the total first and full year yields to the Exchequer in the manner outlined by the Deputy including the tapering at a rate of 2% per €1,000 of the PAYE, EIC and Personal Credits for all income earners whose income is between €100,000 and €150,000 per year resulting in no entitlement to these tax credits when income is in excess of €150,000. The Widowed Person or Surviving Civil Partner Credit of €2,190 is similarly tapered out for incomes between €100,000 and €150,000 per year. These estimates are based on tax units. As the Deputy will be aware, jointly assessed couples are considered a single tax unit. Therefore the variables have been calculated on the basis of the combined income of the tax unit, as individual incomes for each member of the tax unit are not available. Therefore, the estimates insofar as they relate to this cohort of tax units are very tentative.

This estimate also includes the introduction of a new Universal Social Charge (USC) band and various rates on gross income in excess of €150,000. It should also be noted that this cost-

ing retains the 3% USC surcharge on individuals who have non-PAYE income that exceeds €100,000 in a year. All other aspects of the current USC structure also remain unchanged.

	First Year €M	Full Year €M
Credit Tapering and 2% USC Increase	377	486
Credit Tapering and 3% USC Increase	427	554
Credit Tapering and 4% USC Increase	477	622
Credit Tapering and 5% USC Increase	527	691

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

Disability Act Employment Targets

245. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27137/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies and includes:

- the promotion and support of the employment of people with disabilities
- compliance with any statutory Code of Practice
- meeting the target of 3% of employing people with disabilities and
- reporting annually on the achievement of these obligations.

The Department of Finance adheres to its requirements as set out by Disability Act of 2005. The Department has a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) in place who works closely with the National Disability Authority (NDA) to ensure that the Department is fully compliant with its obligations under the Act. All new entrants complete a confidential disability survey which is forwarded to the DLO for actioning, where appropriate. These declarations are amalgamated with an annual survey and forwarded to the NDA as part of our annual returns.

In 2016, the Department satisfied the quota at 3%. In 2015 and 2014, the Department exceeded this quota, making returns of 4.9% and 3.4% respectively.

The Department has two bodies under its aegis. The Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) and the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). The NTMA is responsible for its own recruitment and selection process while the Tax Appeals Commission uses the services of the Public Appointments Service.

The DLO coordinates the annual returns to the NDA for TAC and NTMA. The DLO also engages with bodies under its aegis and supplies guidance and advice when requested to do so.

The Department does not run competitions specifically for applicants with disabilities how-

ever the Department is an equal opportunities employer and we rely on the Public Appointments Service through the “Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities” in ensuring that all applicants have necessary accommodations in place for them to be able to engage with the competitions process in a fair and equal manner.

NAMA Debtor Agreements

246. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the total sum which NAMA has allowed developers retain once stretch targets have been received. [27160/17]

247. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the number of times developers have been allowed to retain upside profits once stretch targets have been achieved. [27161/17]

248. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the amount each developer has individually been allowed to keep once stretch targets have been achieved. [27162/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 to 248, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that NAMA is required, under Section 10 of the NAMA Act 2009, to obtain the best financial return from its acquired loans. Among the measures adopted to achieve this statutory objective, NAMA enters into arrangements with some co-operative debtors which involve measures to motivate debtors to maximise the return to NAMA from the workout of the assets controlled by these debtors. NAMA must operate as a commercial entity and I am advised that, in the absence of arrangements with debtors, the return achieved on the assets securing NAMA loans would fall short of the best achievable financial return required under Section 10.

Under arrangements agreed with debtors, the concessions granted to NAMA by debtors include charges over unencumbered assets, improvement in NAMA’s legal priority over charged assets, the perfection of legal security deficiencies by the debtor, cooperation with professional practitioners and the completion of development projects aimed at enhancing debt recovery. It is a matter of public record that, as part of the loan acquisition process, NAMA encountered difficulties with some of the legal documentation received from the participating institutions, including items of security not actually taken, guarantees not confirmed on the granting of new facilities and development loans with no security over work-in-progress or step-in rights. Other issues included defective land registry dealings and missing original documents (such as title). In many cases, the co-operation of debtors was required to ensure remediation of these issues.

In certain cases, a full or partial restructure of a debtor’s debts will involve the extension of new facilities to replace the facilities originally advanced by participating institutions, thus allowing the debtor more time to enhance assets and improve the overall return for NAMA.

Among the arrangements agreed with debtors in return for concessions which improve NAMA’s return are compromises of personal guarantees, debt compromise, potential profit share arrangements and debt restructuring. These vary according to the particular circumstances of each debtor connection and are conditional on the achievement of agreed milestones and on meeting stretch targets. In such cases, the debtor may share a small proportion of surplus proceeds. Such arrangements are particularly appropriate and necessary where facilities are non-recourse or where there is limited recourse. I am advised by NAMA that such arrangements have been agreed with 34 debtor connections to date. It should be remembered that NAMA acquired the loans of almost 800 debtor connections and 5,000 borrowing entities from the participating institutions. I am further advised that NAMA remains in ongoing negotiation with at

least 20 other debtor connections in relation to prospective arrangements, debtor concessions and the requisite cooperation which would enable NAMA to maximise debt recovery. It is not certain that agreement will be reached in all of these negotiations.

The fundamental principle underlying any arrangement is that NAMA's return under the arrangement exceeds the return that would apply in the absence of the arrangement. I am advised that the adoption of agreed arrangements with debtors has been an important mechanism to enable NAMA to ensure ongoing debtor co-operation in cases where otherwise debtors would refuse to cooperate and would opt instead for an insolvency process which would ultimately yield a lower net return to NAMA, particularly when enforcement costs are taken into account. NAMA advise that many debtors would not have maintained their co-operation unless they had clarity as to the long-term benefit to them of that co-operation.

I am advised by NAMA that the information sought by the Deputy in Questions 27160/17 and 27162/17 is confidential and that disclosure of this information would compromise NAMA's negotiating position and thereby place it at a commercial disadvantage in its ongoing negotiations with debtors. This would ultimately be to the detriment of the financial return that NAMA could generate from the acquired loan portfolio. Under Section 202 (1) (d) of the NAMA Act 2009, 'confidential information' is defined as including 'information the disclosure of which would tend to place NAMA, a NAMA group entity or the NTMA at a commercial disadvantage'.

Tax Agreements

249. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the European Commission's study on structures of aggressive tax planning and indicators published in December 2015; if his officials have examined the report; if action has been taken since the publication of the report; if so, the actions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27170/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand the question refers to a working paper that was prepared by consultants and published by the European Commission in December 2015. The Study highlights features of the tax regimes in each EU Member State that, in the view of the authors, could potentially be indicators of aggressive tax planning.

The agreed international approach to tackling aggressive tax planning is for all countries to implement the OECD Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) recommendations, which were agreed in October 2015. Ireland is fully committed to implementing these recommendations and this process began with the implementation of Country by Country Reporting in Finance Act 2015. We have also fully implemented OECD exchange of information requirements in respect of tax rulings as agreed in BEPS Action 5.

The EU's Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive, which was agreed in June 2016, represented a significant further step towards the implementation of the BEPS recommendations. The Directive will see three of the other key OECD BEPS recommendations implemented across Europe. These are rules targeting hybrid mismatches, interest deductibility rules and Controlled Foreign Company rules. Ireland will implement these changes in line with agreed deadlines set out in the Directive.

Most recently, the BEPS Multilateral Instrument was signed by Ireland and 67 other countries in Paris on 7 June. The Multilateral Instrument will provide the mechanism for extensive changes to tax treaties globally. It will ensure that tax treaties are updated to reflect a number

of important OECD BEPS actions, including agreed standards on treaty shopping and dispute resolution.

We expect the European Commission to shortly publish a draft Directive requiring the disclosure of aggressive tax schemes in line with a BEPS recommendation. Ireland already has such rules and will engage with other Member States to ensure that we can agree a Directive which faithfully implements the BEPS recommendation in this area.

Finally, the review by an independent expert of Ireland's corporation tax code which is currently underway will include consideration of what further actions Ireland may need to take to ensure we are fully compliant with the OECD BEPS recommendations.

Tax Credits

250. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of increasing the home carer's allowance for all families with children between six months and three years of age by €960 per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27276/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume the Deputy is referring to the Home Carer Tax Credit. I am advised by Revenue that in 2014, the most recent year for which figures are available, the maximum amount of home carer tax credit available was €810 and the overall cost to the Exchequer for this credit was an estimated €60.9 million, in respect of 80,900 recipients. The Deputy will be aware that the home carer tax credit was increased to €1,000 in Budget 2016, and was further increased to €1,100 in Budget 2017.

As it is not possible to separately identify from Revenue records those who would benefit under the changes suggested by the Deputy (or to assess whether they would be in a position to absorb at least some of the additional credit), there is no basis on which to provide an estimated cost to the Exchequer of the Deputy's proposal.

However, a Post-Budget 2017 Ready Reckoner is available on the Revenue website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>. This Ready Reckoner shows a wide range of detailed information, including, on Page 6, the estimated cost to the Exchequer of changes to the home carer tax credit for all those currently availing of it.

Financial Services Regulation

251. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to an investment fund (details supplied) and the excessive losses incurred by many customers of a bank (details supplied) who are of the view that they were over exposed unnecessarily and unethically to these losses by a bank; if this fund was covered by the Central Bank Act 1942; his plans to amend section 33 of this Act; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27299/17]

252. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if there have been specific banking regulations introduced to prevent bank customers from being overly exposed to investments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27300/17]

253. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to investigate an investment fund (details supplied) in view of the number of persons who have suffered massive losses in cases in which higher than interest rates on loans were the norm; if his attention has been drawn to the overcharging by a bank (details supplied) on these funds; if his Department

has received complaints from customers regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27301/17]

254. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to personnel in a bank (details supplied) being disciplined for their involvement with selling or managing an investment fund (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27302/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 251 to 254, inclusive, together.

I am aware of the matters relating to certain property investment funds that the Deputy has raised, which my officials will continue to monitor.

However, as litigation relating to a number of funds, including those identified by the Deputy, are currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

Speaking broadly I would point out that significant measures have been brought forward aimed at improving the transparency and appropriateness of investment products in the financial services industry. The Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II) and the Markets in Financial Instruments Regulation (MiFIR) aim to strengthen the protection of investors by making financial markets more efficient, resilient and transparent. The framework also increases the supervisory powers of regulators and provide clear operating rules for all trading activities. The funds sector is being overhauled by the Alternative Investment Fund Managers Directive (AIFMD), which provides for the Europe-wide regulation of the management of collective investment schemes aimed at professional or qualified investors.

Private Rented Accommodation

255. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the taxation commission for landlords that his Department put in place after the introduction of rent pressure zones to examine landlords' cost base; when the report of this commission will be finalised; and if it will be made available to Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas for scrutiny prior to the budget. [27314/17]

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

A public consultation lasting for four weeks was conducted from March to April 2017 and the consultation paper asked 10 targeted questions which covered subjects such as mortgage interest relief, capital repayment relief, rental accommodation as a pension investment, the deductibility of various expenses, Capital Gains Tax, long-term tenancies, accidental landlords, the Rent-a-Room Scheme and vacant properties. Individuals had the option to answer any, all, or none of the questions, when making their submissions. The consultation received almost 70 written submissions from a wide range of interested parties, including individual landlords,

representative bodies and charitable organisations.

It is estimated that the report of the Working Group will be presented to the Minister for Finance by the end of July 2017, to allow for consideration of any of the options put forward, as part of his or her deliberations for Budget 2018. The normal convention with regard to such reports is that they are published on the budget website (www.budget.gov.ie) on Budget day in conjunction with all other Budget related information.

VAT Rate Reductions

256. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a reduction of VAT on residential construction to stimulate construction activity. [27316/17]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government committed to ask the Oireachtas to consider the merits of a temporary targeted reduction of the rate of VAT from 13.5% to 9% on new, affordable houses and apartments, both public and private, timed to generate the maximum impact on supply and to target principally the purchasers of affordable homes.

In its Report of June 2016, the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness reviewed the costs of construction including VAT, in the light of the Programme for Partnership Government commitment. They recommend that the Housing Agency annually review construction costs but did not recommend that the VAT rate on new residential property be reduced.

The ESRI reported in 2016 that any tax incentives aimed at developers are likely to have little effect on supply while other constraints are in place, such as stringent planning regulations, infrastructural constraints, and access to finance and building costs, including the impact of building regulations. In the presence of such constraints, the introduction of any tax incentive would likely lead to a transfer of tax revenue away from the State without any significant effect on supply.

With this in mind, ahead of last year's Budget I decided that relief would be better operated through the income tax rather than the VAT system. In this context I introduced the Help-to-Buy incentive in Budget 2017 to help encourage the building of additional new homes. That scheme will run until the end of 2019.

VAT Rate Reductions

257. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the cost estimates for introducing a special 9% VAT rate on residential construction in budget 2018. [27319/17]

287. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance his views on introducing a 0% VAT rate on all renovations or alterations of empty residential premises as in the UK (details supplied). [27816/17]

288. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of introducing a 0% VAT rate on all renovations or alterations of empty residential premises as in the UK (details

supplied). [27818/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257, 287 and 288 together.

The VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, primarily Council Directive 2006/112/EC, with which Irish VAT law must comply. The VAT Directive provides that Member States must apply a standard VAT rate at no lower than 15% and may apply two reduced rates between 5% and 15% to certain goods and services as listed in Annex III of the Directive. In addition, the Directive allows for historic VAT treatment to be maintained under set conditions. This allows for the continuation of the application of a zero rate or a rate less than 5% to goods or services where the rate applied on and from 1 January 1991. The zero rate of VAT cannot be applied to any new item. Similarly, the VAT Directive allows Member States to continue to exempt certain suppliers which were exempt on 1 January 1978 but the exemption cannot be applied to any new items.

As Ireland did not apply a zero rate of VAT to supplies of residential construction, or the renovation and alteration of empty residential premises on and from 1 January 1991, it is not legally possible to introduce a zero rate for these services. The UK can apply a zero VAT rate to the renovation and alteration of empty residential premises as they did so on and from 1 January 1991.

With regard to applying a 9% VAT rate to residential construction, I am advised by Revenue that it is tentatively estimated that introducing a 9% VAT rate specific to residential construction in Budget 2018 could cost in the region of €240m. This is based on the extrapolation of projections from a number of data sources, including residential completions, residential construction projects under current development and the average selling price of new residential homes.

VAT Rate Reductions

258. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether it would be legally permissible and technically possible to implement a timed VAT reduction on residential construction that would by statute expire after a certain number of years as a means of stimulating construction activity. [27320/17]

289. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 146 of 9 May 2017, the reason his Department is of the view that it is unfavourable to have two separate VAT rates applying to construction services, especially if the policy objective is to reduce the cost of one form of construction vis a vis another form in view of the high returns on commercial development compared to residential at present. [27819/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 258 and 289 together.

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

Applying a lower VAT rate to the construction of new residential properties would result in different VAT rates between residential and non-residential construction services, and it would also involve having different VAT rates between the construction of new homes and repair and maintenance work on those homes. This would be very difficult to administer and could lead to

accidental or fraudulent underpayments of VAT.

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

The ESRI reported in 2016 that any tax incentives aimed at developers are likely to have little effect on supply while other constraints are in place, such as stringent planning regulations, infrastructural constraints, and access to finance and building costs, including the impact of building regulations. In the presence of such constraints, the introduction of any tax incentive would likely lead to a transfer of tax revenue away from the State without any significant effect on supply.

With this in mind, ahead of last year's Budget I decided that relief would be better operated through the income tax rather than the VAT system. In this context I introduced the Help-to-Buy incentive in Budget 2017 to help encourage the building of additional new homes. One of the main policy aims of the incentive is to assist a first-time purchaser fund the deposit required to purchase or self-build a new house or apartment to live in as their home. The other main aim of the policy is to help encourage the building of additional new properties. By restricting the initiative solely to new dwellings and new self-builds, it is anticipated that the resulting increase in demand for affordable new build homes should encourage the construction of an additional supply of such properties. The scheme will run until the end of 2019.

Question Heading for question(s) 259

259. Deputy Frank O'Rourke asked the Minister for Finance the regulations with regard to peer to peer lending; if there is recourse for lenders in the event of borrower default; if there is protections for borrowers in the event of default; if there is regulation of the platforms; if there is regulation of the provision of a peer to peer loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27321/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, peer-to-peer lending is a form of crowdfunding. Crowdfunding involves obtaining small amounts of funding from a large number of different sources, generally individuals but they can also be institutions. Peer-to-peer lending involves lenders providing money directly to borrowers as a loan that is to be repaid with interest through an online crowdfunding platform.

Crowdfunding is an innovative, technology-based form of finance that can be a valuable source of funding for SMEs, either as a complement, or as an alternative, to traditional bank finance. Crowdfunding can provide consumers and smaller investors with a higher rate of return, at a higher risk, than is generally available from deposits or traditional investments.

Crowdfunding, including peer-to-peer lending, is not currently a regulated activity in Ireland. Therefore, there is no regulation of crowdfunding platforms or the provision of peer-to-peer loans. Given this, there are no formal consumer protections available for borrowers using a peer-to-peer lending platform, including in the event of default. The Central Bank of Ireland has issued an information notice alerting consumers to this fact and the associated risks, avail-

able at:

<https://www.centralbank.ie/consumer-hub/consumer-notices/consumer-notice-on-crowd-funding-including-peer-to-peer-lending>

The European Commission has indicated that harmonised European regulation of crowdfunding is not anticipated at present.

The IFS 2020 2017 Action Plan commits the Government to conducting a public consultation on the potential regulation of crowdfunding, having regard to international best practice and in the context of the EU Commission Action Plan on Building a Capital Markets Union. My Department recently launched a public consultation on the regulation of crowdfunding that closed on 2nd June 2017.

My Department will now consider the submissions received from the public consultation and these will help inform my Department's policy position on whether or not a regulatory regime for crowdfunding would be appropriate and if a bespoke regime should be implemented in Ireland.

NAMA Transactions

260. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a dividend payment from NAMA to the Exchequer is treated as a financial transaction or if it improves the general Government balance; when he expects to receive a dividend from NAMA arising from the expected surplus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27360/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): NAMA expects to repay its outstanding guaranteed senior debt of €500m by the end of 2017 and to redeem its subordinated debt in March 2020. NAMA will focus on completing its ongoing deleveraging, its Dublin Docklands SDZ and residential funding programmes in the interim period to 2020. NAMA's 2016 Annual Report was laid before the Oireachtas on 1 June 2017 and provides further insight into the Agency's expectations regarding these activities. The report is also available on NAMA's website via: <https://www.nama.ie/about-us/publications/annual-reports/>.

It is through the successful completion of these objectives that NAMA anticipates a surplus in the region of €3bn (revised upwards from €2.3bn), which will be returned to the State once it completes its work.

As per section 60(2) of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA may use surplus funds to redeem and cancel its debt. Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's debt has been redeemed in full.

As has been discussed with Eurostat, from an accounting perspective, once the senior debt, subordinated debt, and private investors have been repaid then NAMA (the Agency), which is in Government, would be the sole shareholder and, as such, NAMA (the SPV) would then become classified into the Government sector. This is expected to occur in 2020, no later than the time at which the private shareholders have been fully compensated. At this point in time NAMA will have no debt.

As such, there is no impact on the general government balance.

Fiscal Data

261. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm media reports that there is €200 million in net fiscal space available for 2018 and €3 billion of fiscal space to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27367/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the most recent estimate of the net fiscal space available for 2018 is €1.2 billion (The gross fiscal space is €1.8 billion but €600 million of this is pre-committed spending in order to address factors including demographics). This figure was set out in the documentation that accompanied Budget 2017 last October. In answer to previous PQs, I have set out that the carryover cost of measures introduced in Budget 2017 amounts to c.€700 million, leaving c.€500 million available for allocation in Budget 2018 for tax and expenditure measures. The amount available for expenditure, based on an allocation of a 2:1 split between expenditure and taxes, as set out in the Programme for Government is to provide for both current and capital expenditure measures. The €200 million the Deputy refers to relates to an estimate of the amount available for current expenditure.

The estimated net fiscal space for the period 2019 to 2021 in Budget 2017 was c.€8.1 billion.

These estimates are consistent with compliance of Ireland's obligations under the fiscal rules, namely the expenditure benchmark pillar of the preventive arm of the Stability and Growth Pact. According to this metric, fiscal space is calculated as the potential growth rate of the economy (10-year average) less an appropriate margin which takes into account the fact that we have not yet achieved our medium term budgetary objective of a structural deficit of 0.5 per cent of GDP.

Fiscal space projections are based on a number of moving parts (GDP deflator, reference rates for potential growth, etc.) set each year by the European Commission. The Commission published these as part of its Spring Forecast and my officials are incorporating these into the updated calculations for fiscal space.

Furthermore the value for general government expenditure, including gross fixed capital formation, produced by the Central Statistics Office is an integral part of the calculation and can change when the National Income and Expenditure release is published in the summer. Given all these moving parts, I want to stress that the figures, as always, are work-in-progress estimates and will evolve over time.

The next estimate of the fiscal space for 2018 will be set out in the Summer Economic Statement 2017 published later this month.

Tax Code

262. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of VAT and customs duty that would apply on the importation of a wheelchair for a person (details supplied) in County Cork from the United States of America. [27402/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the person concerned will have no liability to customs duty or VAT on the importation of a wheelchair for his own use.

Electric wheelchairs are classified at tariff code 8713 90 00 00. The rate of customs duty for importation of electric wheelchairs from the United States of America is 0%. VAT on importation of the electric wheelchair is also 0% in accordance with paragraph 11(3) of Schedule 2 of the VATCA 2010 which provides that the zero rate of VAT applies to the supply of medical equipment including invalid carriages designed for use by invalids or infirm persons.

The wheelchair should be declared at importation using commodity code 8713 90 00 00.

Fiscal Data

263. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the adjustment which is made for indexation of income tax bands and income tax rates when calculating the fiscal space for budget 2018. [27418/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Additional revenue generated from a policy decision to not to proceed with indexation was included in the discretionary revenue measures set out in Table A7 Application of Expenditure Benchmark, on a no policy change from 2018 onwards in Annex 2 of the Budget 2017 publication.

It was estimated that the total Exchequer yield in 2018 from non-indexation of the Income Tax and Universal Social Charge systems would yield c. €450 million, which would increase net fiscal space. This is made up of c. €65 million carryover from non-indexation in 2017 and c. €385m in the first year yield that should arise from proceeding with non-indexation in 2018.

The forthcoming Summer Economic Statement 2017, will set out up-to-date projections of fiscal space out to 2021. However, the cost of non-indexation in 2018, will not be finalised until the Revenue Commissioners have completed and published its Pre-Budget 2018 Income Tax Ready Reckoner, which is expected in Quarter 3 2017. In addition, the updated macroeconomic drivers used in these calculations will await the scheduled endorsement of the macroeconomic forecast by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in early October 2017.

VAT Rate Increases

264. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected revenue that would be generated from the restoration of the VAT rate for the hospitality sector from 9% to 13.5%. [27419/17]

265. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance the expected revenue that would be generated from the restoration of the VAT rate from 9% to 13.5% to the hotel industry (details supplied). [27420/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 264 and 265 together.

I am informed by Revenue that it is tentatively estimated that the revenue generated from the restoration of the VAT rate from 9% to 13.5% is likely to be in the region of €490m for the hospitality sector as a whole and €190m specific to the accommodation sector, in both cases assuming no change in consumer behaviour.

Housing Data

266. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of residential units in the possession of each of the State backed banks that are currently unoccupied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27436/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Dep-

uty is not available within the Department of Finance.

As the Deputy is aware, the Relationship Framework agreements define the arm's-length nature of the relationship between the State and the banks in which the State has an investment, and as such each bank is individually and independently responsible for managing their stock of repossessed properties. As noted in the annual reports cited below, repossessed properties are offered for sale by the banks using external agents as soon as practicable.

AIB have informed me that it is AIB Bank policy to sell all residential assets on a vacant possession basis. All disclosures in relation to AIB's residential mortgages – properties in possession can be found on page 109 of AIB's Financial Report 2016, which can be found here: <https://aib.ie/content/dam/aib/investorrelations/docs/resultscentre/annualreport/annual-financial-report-2016.pdf>

PTSB have advised me that from the 1st January 2016 to the 31st Dec 2016, permanent tsb took possession of 116 properties; just 11 of these were a result of an Executed Order (i.e. a repossession achieved through the courts) while the remaining were properties which were either surrendered to the bank voluntarily by their owners or properties where the bank took repossession because it deemed the properties to be at risk (typically left vacant by owners). At the 31st December 2016 the bank had a total of 463 properties in its possession. These figures are reflected in the bank's 2016 annual report, available here: <http://www.permanenttsbgroup.ie/~media/Files/I/Irish-Life-And-Permanent/Attachments/pdf/2017/ptsbgh-full-year-report-2016.pdf>

Bank of Ireland disclose information on properties in possession and repossessions disposed of for their Retail Ireland Mortgage portfolio on page 372 of their annual report. A link to the 2016 Bank of Ireland report is available here: <https://investorrelations.bankofireland.com/wp-content/assets/BOI-Annual-Report-2016.pdf>

I am firmly of the view that the Irish banking system has an important role to play in the normalisation of the Irish housing sector through the speedy return of properties in their possession to the general market. I am also conscious that where a bank comes into possession of a property the institution has a fiduciary responsibility to dispose of the property in a manner that satisfies its independent, commercial mandate. However I welcome the fact that this is now also happening through interaction with the Housing Agency, local authorities or other means.

I would also draw the Deputy's attention to the most recent mortgage arrears and repossession statistics released by the Central Bank: <https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/mortgage-arrears>.

VAT Payments

267. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the composition of a matter the EU calls the VAT gap, the reduced or zero rates applicable and the cost attached to each instance by product or service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27437/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The VAT gap is an estimate comparing a maximum theoretical tax liability (approximated from economic activity in a country) against actual VAT collected. The difference arises due to a range of factors. These include revenue loss due to fraud and evasion. However, it also covers insolvencies, bankruptcies, administrative errors, legal tax optimisation as well as miscalculations.

Since 2009 the European Commission has hired consultants to estimate the VAT gap in each

EU Member State. Given its nature, a tax gap cannot be easily or reliably measured. It must be estimated on the basis of limited data and making a number of assumptions. While Ireland has engaged with Commission on this topic, I am advised that Revenue has concerns around the robustness of the methodology used and the accuracy of the results. Notwithstanding these concerns, it is useful to note the overall trends. Ireland's VAT gap is estimated at 9% for 2014 in the most recent study (published in 2016) and down from 13% for 2013. From an EU perspective the average VAT gap is estimated at 14.1% with Ireland ranking as the 8th lowest across Member States.

As well as the main VAT gap, the Commission also estimates the policy gap (an indicator of the additional VAT revenue that a Member State could theoretically, i.e. with perfect tax compliance, generate if a uniform VAT rate applied on all goods and services). Components of the policy gap include the loss in VAT liability due to the application of reduced rates and the loss in liability due to the implementation of exemptions. The Commission's consultants estimate that Ireland has a 52.8% measure for the policy gap (VAT revenues would increase by 52.8% with the application of a uniform VAT rate to items that are exempt or zero rated, e.g. the provision of medical services, education, food, children's' clothing and footwear, etc.). The EU average is 43.3%.

The VAT policy gap does not provide a detailed breakdown of the costs within each VAT rate or for VAT exempt activities. Essentially the policy gap measures the total revenue that would be collected if the standard VAT rate was applied to the supplies of all goods and services. For example, I am informed by Revenue that if the standard rate of VAT was applied to the supply of all zero-rated food items, the potential VAT revenue yields would be in the region of €1.5 billion.

Departmental Contracts

268. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27452/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has not awarded contracts to Accenture since March 2011. However, I am advised that two Bodies under my Department's remit have provided positive returns in reply to the Deputy's question. I shall outline their returns in tabular format as follows:

Body	Contracts Awarded to Accenture per annum since March 2011	Cost per Contract	Basis for each Contract
Central Bank	2011 Nil	N/A	N/A
	2012 No. S0001206	€398,020 (ex-vat)	The Bank conducted a tender competition in accordance with Directive 2004/18/EC (OJEU Notice 2010/S 65-097832) for a Framework Agreement for the Provision of Organisational Development, Change Management Business Analysis and Information Management Support Services for the Central Bank of Ireland. Accenture was one of the firms appointed under Lot 3 - Provision of Business Process Management Services. Contract No. S0001206 was issued to Accenture on 12 March 2012 on conclusion of a mini-competition run under this Framework Agreement for Provision of Business Analysis Services to the Central Bank of Ireland.
	2013 No. S0001206	€64,262 (ex-vat)	Details as above

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Contracts Awarded to Accenture per annum since March 2011	Cost per Contract	Basis for each Contract
	2014 Nil	N/A	N/A
	2015 Nil	N/A	N/A
	2016 No. S0001942	€204,270 (ex-vat)	The Bank conducted a tender competition in accordance with Directive 2004/18/EC (OJEU Notice 2015/S 089-160377) for the supply of a Multiple-Supplier Framework Agreement for Software Development Lifecycle Services. Accenture was appointed as one of several framework participants to this Framework Agreement under contract No. S0001942 issued on 13 November 2015
	2017 Nil	N/A	N/A
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	PROVISION OF EXTERNAL ICT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT 31st August 2010 – 29th November 2013	1st March 2013 – 29th November 2013 €9,726,407	Public Procurement in 2010
	PROVISION OF EXTERNAL ICT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT 30th November 2013 – December 2016	2014 – €14,191,307 2015 – €11,122,437 2016 – €13,905,206	Public Procurement in 2013
	PROVISION OF EXTERNAL ICT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT Jan 2017 to December 2018 (option to extend for 2 additional years)	2017 to date: €8,948,090	Public Procurement in 2016

Revenue Commissioners

269. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance if an appointment system is in operation in other local Revenue Commissioners inquiry offices across the State; and if other offices still offer walk in services to members of the public. [27463/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that they have 18 public offices of which 13 currently provide an appointments service.

The provision of an appointments service reflects a reduced demand for the traditional ‘walk-in’ services to Revenue’s public offices - the number of personal callers fell by 64% since 2008. By mid-July 2017 Revenue envisages that all public offices except Dublin (Central Revenue Information Office (CRIO), Cathedral Street) will offer an appointments service with the public offices in Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway continuing to offer a walk-in service in conjunction with the appointments service. There are plans to introduce an appointments service in parallel with the walk-in service in the Dublin (CRIO) at a future date, but the timeframe for this has not yet been determined.

I am assured by Revenue that they are committed to making it as easy and as straightforward as possible for taxpayers to be compliant. Revenue’s Statement of Strategy 2017 - 2019 makes clear that commitment to providing advice and information both online and through other channels.

Revenue Commissioners Enforcement Activity

270. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) who has an agreement with the Revenue Commissioners regarding payment of outstanding moneys; if this matter has been passed to a debt collection agency; the status of the amounts owed; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[27535/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue's clear preference is always to engage with taxpayers and businesses and where possible to agree mutually acceptable payment arrangements in preference to deploying debt collection/enforcement sanctions. Cases are only referred to enforcement agents, including Sheriffs and external solicitors, where all attempts to engage with the taxpayer/business have failed to resolve the situation.

The person in question has a poor tax compliance record and has consistently failed to file tax returns or pay liabilities on a timely basis. Revenue has confirmed that the person did not have any payment agreement in place up to the time the debt was referred to the Sheriff on 29 June 2016 and has only very recently filed outstanding Income Tax returns in respect of 2015 and 2016.

Prior to 29 June 2016 the person had failed to respond to a number of reminder notifications from Revenue in regard to the outstanding debt. This left Revenue with no alternative but to refer the outstanding tax and associated statutory interest to the Sheriff for collection. A number of discussions subsequently took place between the Sheriff and the person but only one part payment was received in October 2016. The Sheriff had started seizure proceedings against the person in advance of the part payment being received.

The up to date position is that the person has very recently forwarded post dated cheques to the Sheriff, which do not cover the full tax, statutory interest and cost components of the overall liability. The Sheriff has temporarily suspended further action on foot of the payments to allow the person some further time to pay the remaining arrears. However it is inevitable that the enforcement action will be resumed if the remaining debt is not paid or if the post dated cheques are not honoured.

Corporation Tax Regime

271. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of the ten companies that paid 37% corporation tax in 2016 that were members of the same group; and the number of groups of companies that paid 37% corporation tax in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27578/17]

273. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies that are dealt with by the Revenue Commissioners' large cases division for the purposes of corporation tax in each of the past ten years; the total receipts from these companies in each of the past ten years; if he will provide this figure as a percentage of total tax take in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27622/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 273 together.

In relation to Question 27578/17, I am advised by Revenue that two of the ten largest companies (that paid 37% of net Corporation Tax receipts in 2016) were members of the same corporate group. The percentage of the net Corporation Tax attributable to the top ten groups in 2016 was 40.8%.

With regards to Question 27622/17, I am further advised that the table below shows the number of Corporation Tax returns filed by companies under the auspices of Revenue's Large Cases Division ("LCD"), the total Corporation Tax receipts from these companies, and the percentage of the total net receipts for the years 2007 to 2016 inclusive. The number of companies

within LCD fluctuates, for example due to mergers, acquisitions, and new companies being registered, thus the number of Corporation Tax returns filed by LCD companies by year has been provided instead. Figures for Corporation Tax returns for 2016 are not yet available, as returns in respect of accounting periods ending in 2016 are not due to be filed until later in the year.

Year	Number of LCD CT Returns	CT Net Receipts LCD Companies €m	CT Net Receipts All Companies €m	LCD as a % of Total Net CT Receipts
2007	7,330	4,705	6,393	73.6%
2008	8,230	3,916	5,071	77.2%
2009	8,754	3,375	3,889	86.8%
2010	9,003	3,481	3,944	88.2%
2011	9,443	2,985	3,500	85.3%
2012	9,588	3,611	4,215	85.7%
2013	9,888	3,640	4,270	85.3%
2014	9,589	3,695	4,617	80.0%
2015	10,190	5,528	6,873	80.5%
2016	-	6,034	7,352	82.1%

Motor Insurance

272. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the measures which are being taken by the Government to assist returning citizens that may have lost their Irish no claims bonus that have had clean driving records while overseas from the high costs of obtaining car insurance upon their return; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27621/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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 such as returning emigrants.

Notwithstanding the above, I am aware of the problems that high motor insurance costs is causing returning emigrants and in this regard the Deputy should note that the issue was considered by the Cost of Insurance Working Group which published its motor insurance report in January 2017.

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 be aware that by the end of 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 the end of 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.

Question No. 273 answered with Question No. 271.

Household Charge Administration

274. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the Revenue Commissioners deducting household charge arrears from local property tax payments without providing invoices and receipts of such payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27626/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue discontinued issuing paper receipts in respect of tax payments in July 2011 in accordance with Section 960E of the Taxes Consolidation Act (as amended). The paper receipts were replaced by an online facility, which is fully secure and available on a twenty four hour basis. The online facility has been available in respect of Local Property Tax since its commencement in 2013.

In regard to arrears of Household Charge (HHC), Section 156 of the Finance Local Property Tax Act (as amended) converted all Household Charge (HHC) liabilities that were still outstanding on 1 July 2013 to Local Property Tax (LPT) and increased the outstanding charge to €200. Section 156 also made Revenue responsible for the collection of the outstanding amounts.

Revenue has confirmed to me that the Deputy has very recently discussed the case in question with the LPT team and was advised that the person received a reminder notification in respect of her LPT arrear (i.e. the converted HHC liability) in May 2016 and also received the normal reminder notification in respect of her 2017 LPT liability in November 2016. The person subsequently paid €90 through one of the approved Payment Service Providers in March 2017. The payment was allocated to her earlier LPT debt as this was the oldest liability on her record, thereby minimising her exposure to interest charges on foot of late payment.

A further compliance letter issued to the person in May 2017 advising her of the balances still due in respect of the 2017 LPT liability to which no response has yet been received.

Revenue has confirmed that the LPT team will make immediate contact with the person to explain why the €90 payment was allocated to the LPT arrears in the first instance and to assist her in any way required in respect of the remaining liabilities.

Banking Operations

275. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if a mobile payment and digital wallet service can be introduced across all banks (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27630/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The question concerns mobile payment platforms that enable a consumer to make card payments using a mobile phone, tablet, watch or similar device. These platforms offer additional choice to consumers. Two international mobile payment platforms launched here over the past six months and several banks are already participating and offering these services.

I am supportive of innovation and increased competition in the payments market, but the decision to participate in a mobile payment platform is ultimately a matter for each individual bank.

In the present environment, where a number of providers are offering mobile payment ser-

vices, I would encourage consumers to contact their bank to see what is available to them and to consider moving to another bank, where possible, if the offer is not satisfactory.

In this regard, as the Deputy may be aware, my Department recently ran a media campaign to raise awareness and promote consumer switching in retail banking markets. This initiative was funded in its entirety by AIB and Permanent TSB as was agreed in the context of both banks' restructuring plans.

Financial Services Regulation

276. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to regulate the companies that provided hire purchase products including personal contract plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27676/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I stated previously in a reply to a question regarding this issue on 1st June, Personal Contract Plans (PCP) are a form of Hire Purchase and both the Central Bank and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) have certain functions and legal powers in relation to the provision of hire-purchase agreements.

The CCPC is responsible under the Consumer Credit Act 1995, for the authorisation of credit intermediaries, some of whom may sell PCPs to consumers on behalf of a finance company. A "credit intermediary" is defined as "a person...who in the course of his business arranges or offers to arrange for a consumer the provision of credit or the letting of goods in return for a commission, payment or consideration of any kind from the provider of the credit or the owner, as the case may be".

The CCPC provides licenses to credit intermediaries and keeps an online list of credit intermediaries holding a valid authorisation which is available on the CCPC website www.ccpc.ie. The CCPC deals with complaints about the advertising of Credit Agreements and the advertising of car finance on credit intermediary websites and in the media. It also has a specific statutory remit to provide personal finance information and education to assist consumers.

If a consumer has concerns regarding the activities of credit intermediaries, they may wish to contact the CCPC. The Financial Services Ombudsman can also investigate complaints from individual consumers about credit intermediaries.

Departmental Expenditure

277. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27709/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Deputy, my Department has not made any payments to Trutz Haase Social and Economic Consultant for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services.

I have provided in tabular format a listing of all Bodies under the Aegis of my Department including confirmation if they have employed the services of this company and details thereof where payments have been made.

Body	Amount paid to Trutz Haase Social and Economic Consultant Intellectual Property Details: HP Deprivation Index
C&AGs	Nil
Central Bank	Nil
Credit Reviewer	Nil
Credit Union Advisory Committee	Nil
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	Nil
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal	Nil
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	Nil
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	Nil
Investor Compensation Company	Nil
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation	Nil
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal	Nil
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	Nil
National Asset Management Agency	Nil
National Treasury Management Agency	Nil
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	€12,100 was paid in November 2006 on a project established within the then new organisational structure (Restructuring) to examine Revenue risk on a geographic basis in County Kildare
Social Finance Foundation	Nil
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	Nil
Tax Appeals Commissioners	Nil

Economic Growth Initiatives

278. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce a new method of measuring the size of the economy and the growth of same in view of the unreliability of GDP as a measurement in an Irish context; the work which has been carried out by his Department and the Central Bank to date in 2017; the input the EU Commission and the fiscal council have had on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27728/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The compilation and publication of statistics on the economy, including GDP, is the responsibility of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), which is independent.

Following the exceptional growth rate recorded in 2015 and the increasing limitations of GDP as a measure of economic activity in Ireland, an Economic Statistics Review Group (ESRG) was established by the CSO last year.

The Group was chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank and was comprised of policy-makers, analysts, regulators, business and trade union representatives and academics including inter alia the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC), Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). My Department was represented on the ESRG by the Chief Economist. The Group also benefitted from the expertise of international observers from Eurostat (representing the European Commission) and the IMF.

The remit of the ESRG was to advise on alternative indicators that would provide better

indicators of economic trends in Ireland. In relation to the size and growth of the economy, the main recommendation from the ESRG was the publication of an alternative measure of Gross National Income, GNI*, which

- (i) excludes the profits of re-domiciled firms in Ireland;
- (ii) excludes the depreciation of foreign-owned assets (especially the depreciation of intellectual property).

It is important to stress that, from a legal perspective, the CSO is compelled to produce existing national accounts and balance of payments statistics, in accordance with internationally agreed methodologies and that our international obligations are still assessed on this basis (e.g. EU budget contribution is still based on GNI). The purpose of the additional indicator is to provide a better picture of underlying trends in the Irish economy.

I understand that the CSO has committed to publishing this alternative indicator, GNI*, in current prices with the Annual National Accounts in late June/early July.

GDP-GNP Levels

279. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when his Department estimates that the State's debt to GDP ratio will reach 45%, 55% and 60% respectively based on the latest projections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27747/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department published a report on 6th June 2017 entitled the "Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland". This Report, which will be published annually, is on the Department's website at the following link:

http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/annual_debt_report_2017%20%28002%29_0.pdf.

As the Deputy is aware, the 2017 Stability Programme Update projected that the debt to GDP ratio will be 62.9 per cent in 2021. As illustrated in Figure 13 on page 19 of the Report, assuming the key inputs such as primary balance, interest and nominal growth rate remain unchanged from those in the 2017 Stability Programme update, it is projected that the debt to GDP ratio of 60 per cent would be achieved in 2022, 55 per cent in 2023/2024 and 45 per cent in 2026.

This projected timing does not factor in proceeds from the sale of banking assets, which will be used to lower debt and thus could bring forward the achievement of the above ratios that the Deputy has queried.

Banking Sector

280. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the advisers employed directly by a bank (details supplied) or his Department to provide advice or expertise related to the sale of the bank; the dates they were employed; the fees payable to each upfront or at the end of the process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27780/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In December of last year, following a competitive procurement process, three firms were appointed by my Department to act as joint global coordinators to lead a selling syndicate in preparation for an AIB IPO. On the 23rd of

March this year I further announced the addition of five joint book runners and a co-lead manager to the syndicate. The syndicate banks have been appointed until July 2018. The three global coordinators lead the transaction performing most of the work, while the book runners and co-lead manager will help to ensure coverage of the broadest possible range of relevant investors both by type and geography when it comes to the marketing and sales effort.

The Deputy should be aware that in line with the State agreements with AIB, all fees incurred by the State in relation to an IPO transaction will be paid by the bank.

Fees are only payable to the syndicate on the completion of a successful transaction, and are proportional to the value of the transaction. As such it is not possible to provide an exact quantum of fees payable as no transaction has occurred yet. However the fees that have been negotiated by my officials are approximately 0.4% of the total transaction size. This is very competitive by reference to comparable transactions. The fee is split across all appointed syndicate banks and the number of firms involved, which is also within precedent, does not affect the overall fee level payable. The prospectus published by AIB estimates the potential fee with the assumption that the shares are listed at the mid-point of the published price range, which gives an indicative figure of €12 million.

Fees will also be payable to our independent financial advisor, Rothschild & Sons, appointed in December 2015 as well as communications advisers Gordon MRM and London-based Citigate Dewe Rogerson, appointed in January 2017. Legal advisers, William Fry, were appointed in February 2015 in relation to matters with respect to the State's investments in AIB. Details of the fees paid to these parties are disclosed on an ongoing basis under the procurement section of the Department's website: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/who-we-are/financials/consultancy/consultancy/>.

In addition to the above, AIB will also incur its own fees and expenses in relation to the initial public offering and these will include broker, corporate advisory, accounting and legal fees. These fees and expenses are a matter for the board and management of AIB, are borne by the company directly and are disclosed as part of their published prospectus. The prospectus is available on the AIB Investor Relations website here: <https://aib.ie/investorrelations/ipo-information>.

Departmental Contracts

281. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that were put in place to ensure that no inside information or conflict of interest existed in the recent sale of buy-to-let mortgages to a company (detail supplied) in view of the fact that the company had previously been employed on a pro bono basis to advise a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27781/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance appointed Goldman Sachs International in December 2015 to provide financial advice to the Department on the capital restructuring of AIB and in respect of the State's investments in AIB. As is customary in these type of engagements, the Goldman Sachs team advising the department was subject to strict confidentiality agreements which preclude them from sharing any information obtained in the course of their work for the Department with any third parties, including any other arm or function of Goldman Sachs.

Separately, Goldman Sachs was appointed by the Department of Finance in March 2017 as a Joint Bookrunner on the selling syndicate for an IPO of AIB.

In the case of AIB, any appointment of advisory firms or decisions on whom to sell assets to, are matters for the board and management of the bank itself.

Tax Code

282. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for further tax increases (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27792/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Alcohol Products Tax is governed in the first instance by the EU Directive on the harmonisation of the structures of excise duties on alcohol. It is not possible to apply different rates based on where alcohol products are sold. In recent years my officials have examined proposals to address below cost selling of alcohol products, including a proposal for a “lid-on” levy to apply to sales of alcoholic products sold in off-licences. On review of this proposal by both the Revenue Solicitor’s Office and the Attorney General, the legal basis for the implementation of such a levy was found to be unsound.

The Deputy will of course be aware that it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment in advance of the Budget on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Corporation Tax Regime

283. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance the action he has taken to prepare for consequences a change in the American corporate tax rate may have on multinational companies located here; if there has been engagement and communication with the Revenue Commissioners on this topic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27797/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I note the proposals that were announced by the Trump Administration for tax reform in recent months. At this stage, we have yet to see the substantive detail of the overall package that will be proposed by the Trump Administration. Agreement between the House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate and President Trump will be needed before any changes can be introduced.

The exact implications of US tax reform for Ireland, and the rest of the world, will depend on the exact nature of any changes which are ultimately agreed.

The proposed reduction in the US corporate tax rate is just one aspect of a wider set of proposals. It also remains to be seen whether any reduction in the US corporate tax rate would be permanent or temporary in nature. At this stage, sufficient details have not been published to enable a comprehensive analysis of the potential impact of the proposals as a whole. My Department, and the Irish Embassy in the US, are closely tracking the debate in the US and we continue to engage with business and others to fully understand the potential impacts of any US reform. Officials in my Department also keep in regular communication with the Revenue Commissioners on this and other international tax issues. Consideration is being given as to how best we could analyse the impact of any US tax reform proposal once the details of proposed changes become available.

One issue that is clear however is that Ireland’s membership of the EU is, and will remain, a key factor in attracting FDI from the US and elsewhere. Global business, from the US or elsewhere, will always want to have operations in the EU, and Ireland will remain very competitive and attractive as an EU location to invest in and do business from.

Ireland's corporation tax regime and 12.5% corporation tax rate will continue to be competitive while also offering long-term certainty to international business. As always, we will remain alert and responsive to any changes in the US or global tax environment.

Film Industry Tax Reliefs

284. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies that availed of the film relief tax credit in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and the amount this tax relief cost the State in each of these years. [27803/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that prior to 2015, the Film Relief scheme, provided for by Section 481 Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, operated by giving relief to individuals and companies investing in the film industry. The information in respect of the tax cost and number of investors who claimed relief under section 481 for the years 2004 to 2014 is available on the Revenue Commissioners webpage at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx>.

With effect from 2015, the scheme provides direct support to film producer companies in the form of a tax credit. However, where an application was received up to and including 14 December 2014, it was processed under the previous scheme. Investors availing of the old scheme can choose the year in which to claim their relief. The provisional number of claimants of the tax credit in 2015 is 1,102 with a cost to the Exchequer of €69.7 million.

The following numbers of companies were granted relief during 2015, 2016 and 2017:

- 2015: 32 companies in respect of 43 films
- 2016: 54 companies in respect of 74 films
- 2017: 15 companies in respect of 21 films (to end Quarter 1 2017).

The information relating to the beneficiaries under the current scheme can be found at:

- 2015 beneficiaries: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/documents/beneficiaries-tax-relief-2015.pdf>.
- 2016 beneficiaries: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/documents/beneficiaries-tax-relief-2016.pdf>.
- 2017 (to Quarter 1) beneficiaries: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/documents/beneficiaries-tax-relief-2017.pdf>.

Questions Nos. 285 and 286 answered with Question No. 234.

Questions Nos. 287 and 288 answered with Question No. 257.

Question No. 289 answered with Question No. 258.

Living City Initiative

290. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the fact that the uptake of the Living City initiative has been lower than anticipated or desired from a policy perspective; the reason for the low take up; his further views on the fact that claiming for the

LCI is unnecessarily complicated and could be made more user friendly (details supplied); his further views on the fact that the public knowledge of the scheme is very low; and his views on whether more regeneration areas should be covered under the scheme. [27826/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Living City Initiative was originally introduced in Finance Act 2013 on a pilot basis to encourage the regeneration of the historic cities of Waterford and Limerick. As you may be aware, the original intention was to restrict the scheme to Georgian houses. The particular focus of the scheme was to encourage people back to the centres of these cities to live in historic buildings, in particular Georgian houses, and to encourage the regeneration of the retail heartland of central business districts. Following an ex-ante cost/benefit analysis of the scheme and consideration of submissions from interested parties, I decided to extend the Initiative in 2014 to the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, and Kilkenny and to broaden its scope to include all houses constructed prior to 1915. The pre-1915 requirement only applies to the residential elements of the scheme (owner-occupier and rented residential) and not to the commercial element which does not have such a restriction.

To date, take-up of the Living City Initiative scheme has been lower than anticipated. Officials in my Department reviewed the Living City Initiative in 2016 in consultation with the relevant councils and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. This review was included in the Report on Tax Expenditures (October 2016) that was published on Budget Day.

In light of the findings in the report, I announced a number of changes to the scheme in Budget 2017 in order to make it more attractive and effective. The principal change extended the residential element of the scheme to landlords, who are now able to claim the relief by way of accelerated capital allowances for the conversion and refurbishment of property, which was built prior to 1915, where such property is to be used for residential purposes. In addition, I also decided to remove the requirement for a pre-1915 building to have been originally constructed for use as a dwelling in order to qualify for the residential element of the Initiative. The floor area restriction for owner-occupiers has also been removed, while the minimum amount of capital expenditure required for eligibility for relief, under all elements of the scheme, was also amended and must now only exceed €5,000. The possibility of extending the special regeneration areas was considered, but I decided that such a change would dilute the incentive's potential impact on the originally targeted areas and that it would be better to get it working effectively before considering any further extension of the areas eligible.

I am advised by Revenue that the number of applications received by the Councils for relief under the residential element of the scheme has increased from 51 in November 2016, before the amendments were introduced, to 61 in April 2017. The scheme was publicised and promoted by way of town hall meetings/workshops and door-to-door leaflet drops organised by the relevant City and County Councils following its launch in May 2015. These workshops were also attended by a representative from Revenue to provide more detailed information as required. Information regarding the Incentive is also available on the websites of Revenue, Department of Finance and the relevant City and County Councils. In addition, my officials have been in contact with officials in the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with regard to potential opportunities to further promote the incentive.

Motor Insurance

291. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the high motor insurance costs which emigrants are facing when they return to live and work here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27840/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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 such as returning emigrants.

Notwithstanding the above, I am aware of the problems that high motor insurance costs is causing returning emigrants and in this regard the Deputy should note that the issue was considered by the Cost of Insurance Working Group which published its motor insurance report in January 2017.

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 be aware that by the end of 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 the end of 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.

Appointments to State Boards

292. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance if any former TDs have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the public appointments service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28215/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I have been advised that no former TDs have been appointed to any of the eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department by the public appointments service.

Tax Code

293. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance the reason a company (details supplied) that was put on the 0% rate of RCT in April 2017 is now subject to a 20% rate of RCT; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27946/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that there were outstanding compliance matters that gave rise to the company concerned being subject to a Relevant Contracts Tax deduction rate of 20%. There is one remaining compliance issue still to be resolved and once this is resolved the deduction rate will be amended to 0% by Revenue. I understand that Revenue will make direct contact with the company to clarify the remaining compliance issue that needs to be attended to.

Questions - Written Answers
Property Tax Exemptions

294. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an exemption from property tax for persons (details supplied) was withdrawn. [27948/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax that places the onus on property owners to correctly claim exemptions in accordance with the legislation as set down.

As part of its LPT compliance programme, Revenue carries out ongoing checks to ensure the various exemptions are correctly claimed and must withdraw the relief and collect the outstanding liabilities where they are not properly due.

The persons in question filed the statutory LPT return in 2013 and claimed an exemption from LPT on the basis of pyritic damage to their property. Supporting documentation subsequently confirmed that the property was remediated in 2012, prior to the commencement of LPT and on that basis does not qualify for the exemption. This left Revenue with no option but to withdraw the relief and seek to collect the LPT liabilities for the years 2013 to 2017 inclusive.

Revenue has assured me that it will engage with the persons concerned in identifying a mutually acceptable payment solution that suits their particular circumstances.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

295. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding tax relief legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28028/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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.

Stability and Growth Pact

296. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance further to parliamentary Question No. 143 of 30 May 2017, the impact on the fiscal space in 2017 and the following years if his Department fails to persuade the EU Commission that the retrospective change cited should not be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28080/17]

297. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if, as per the council recommendation on the 2017 national reform programme for Ireland COM (2017) 507 final, further fiscal adjustments are required in 2017 in order to comply with the fiscal rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28081/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 296 and 297 together.

As the Deputy is aware projections of revenue and expenditure, as set out in Budget 2017 last October, were assessed as being broadly compliant by the European Commission. This included an expected deviation under the expenditure benchmark of approximately €200 million in relation to increased national contributions to the EU Budget.

The European Commission published its recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2017 National Reform Programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2017 Stability Programme of Ireland on the 22 May 2017. Recital eight of the Commission's recommendation calls for Ireland "to achieve an annual fiscal adjustment of 0.6% of GDP towards the medium-term budgetary objective in 2017".

This relates to the required improvement in the structural balance. The Commission's assessment of the 2017 stability programme for Ireland shows that, while there is a deviation under the structural balance pillar, its own forecasts show Ireland as being compliant in 2017.

In regards to the structural balance, both the Commission and Ireland have repeatedly stated that the output gap methodology is subject to considerable volatility and is unsuitable for a small and open economy such as ours. The Commission recommend the expenditure benchmark as the more appropriate reflection of underlying fiscal effort.

In its assessment under the expenditure benchmark pillar the Commission show a deviation in both 2016 and 2017. In the two-year assessment these deviations combined constitute a significant deviation. In its Ex-post Assessment of compliance with the Domestic Budgetary Rule 2016, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council showed that we were strongly compliant in 2016. Therefore we could not have a significant deviation under the two-year assessment. This is only possible with retrospective implementation of a methodological change agreed in late 2016, which is what the Commission show in the DG ECFIN staff Assessment of Ireland's 2017 stability programme.

As I set out in my answer to PQ 143 of 30 May 2017, the Commission's 2017 version of the Vade Mecum on the stability and growth pact states that "compliance with already adopted Council recommendations will continue to be assessed on the basis of methodologies described in the 2016 version of the Vade Mecum"

In future, the Commission will take one-offs systematically into account in the assessment process. However in my view, it cannot be retrospectively applied to 2016 expenditure benchmark assessment or to the 2016/2017 average. My officials have raised this at European level and the Commission have admitted that there may be legal uncertainty with the approach taken its assessment methodology. My officials continue to engage bilaterally with the Commission on this point.

It is not possible to estimate the impact of this methodological change on fiscal space in future years because it will depend on the one-offs that occur.

Michael Noonan

The European Commission published its recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2017 National Reform Programme of Ireland and delivering a Council opinion on the 2017 Stability Programme of Ireland on the 22 May 2017. My officials are currently examining the recommendation and the Commission staff's assessment of Ireland's 2017 Stability Programme Update.

Recital eight of the Commission's recommendation calls for Ireland 'to achieve an annual fiscal adjustment of 0.6% of GDP towards the medium-term budgetary objective in 2017. Based on the Commission's 2017 spring forecast, there is a risk of a significant deviation from the recommended fiscal adjustment over 2016 and 2017 taken together'.

The EU Commission's own forecasts estimate that the required 0.6% of GDP improvement in Ireland's structured balance will be delivered in 2017 and that the average deviation for 2016 and 2017 taken together is 0.1% of GDP. Accordingly, the reference to a risk above would appear to refer to the expenditure benchmark.

The Deputy should be aware that a methodological change was agreed in late 2016 to the way compliance with the expenditure benchmark will be assessed going forward. In future, the Commission will take one-offs systematically into account in the assessment process. However in my view, it cannot be retrospectively applied to 2016 expenditure benchmark assessment or to the 2016/2017 average. Indeed, the 2017 version of the Vade Mecum states that "in order to preserve Member States' legitimate expectations, compliance with already adopted Council recommendations will continue to be assessed on the basis of methodologies described in the

2016 version of the Vade Mecum.”

Nonetheless, the Commission appears to have retrospectively applied this change in its calculations and this would appear to be the basis of its statement. My officials are taking this issue up bilaterally with the European Commission.

Fiscal Policy

298. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the consequences of the State being found to be in a situation in which a significant deviation has occurred under the fiscal rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28082/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are mechanisms for addressing non-compliance with the fiscal rules both domestically and in an EU Regulation, Council Regulation (EC) No 1466/97 on the strengthening of the surveillance of budgetary positions and the surveillance and coordination of economic policies. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2012 enshrines fiscal policy rules in law and established the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) as the independent body at national level with responsibility for monitoring observance of the fiscal rules.

Under the Regulation, the European Commission is required to address a warning to a Member State in the event of a significant observed deviation from the adjustment path towards the medium-term budgetary objective. With regard to the structural balance, a significant deviation is defined as being at least 0.5% of GDP away from the adjustment path in a single year or at least 0.25% of GDP on average per year in two consecutive years. With regard to the expenditure benchmark, a significant deviation is one that has a total impact on the general government balance of at least 0.5% of GDP in a single year or cumulatively in two consecutive years. Within one month of the warning, the Council is required to examine the situation and adopt a recommendation for the necessary policy measures to correct the deviation by a set deadline.

Under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2012 and in line with the requirement in the Fiscal Compact that a correction mechanism shall be triggered automatically, the Government is required to prepare and present a corrective action plan to Dáil Éireann within two months of either the warning of a significant deviation from the European Commission or if the Government consider that there is a failure to comply with the budgetary rule which constitutes a significant deviation. The corrective action plan must specify the period over which the significant deviation will be corrected, set annual targets if the period is longer than a year and specify the size and nature of the revenue and expenditure measures to be adopted. Furthermore, the plan must be consistent with the recommendation addressed to Ireland by the Council.

The European Commission monitors compliance with the Council recommendation. If the MS does not take effective action within the relevant deadline, the Council will make a second recommendation on the lack of effective action and a revised recommendation on action to be taken. If following this there is no action the MS is subject to an interest bearing deposit of 0.2 per cent of GDP. If the MS subsequently takes effective action to correct the deviation the deposit plus interest is returned.

Separately, IFAC monitors compliance by the Government with the corrective action plan presented to Dáil Éireann. If this assessment find non-compliance, then the Government is required to take steps to restore compliance or, if the Government does not accept the assessment, the Government must prepare and lay a statement before Dáil Éireann within two months.

However, subject to the nature and severity of a significant deviation, there would be a

high potential for adverse debt market outcomes. Bond yields in the secondary market for Irish debt would be likely to increase. If such increased yields persisted, then the cost of raising debt to fund new expenditure or to roll over maturing bonds would increase and this would feed through to the general government balance. Increasing debt cost would reduce the money available for expenditure and tax reform.

Departmental Expenditure

299. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Finance the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28139/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has not incurred any cost in designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

Since the introduction of Eircode, efforts made by my Department in implementing it include incorporating Eircodes into all departmental/office addresses on our websites, on new stationery and in email signatures. In addition, the relevant Eircodes are included in public consultation exercises, publications, presentations and other corporate communications.

The Department will continue to incorporate Eircode into new systems, forms and processes as they are developed.

Insurance Costs

300. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that insurance companies will quote private policy holders for commercial vehicles (details supplied). [28221/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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 or vehicles, such as those listed in the details provided.

I am advised that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. These terms can include, for example, the age of the driver, the type and age of car, the claims record, driving experience and penalty points of the driver, the number of drivers and how the car is used. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

Finally, you should be aware that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance.

Insurance Ireland can be contacted at feedback@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Tax Reliefs Application

301. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath qualifies for agricultural relief under favourite nephew; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28262/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that there are two forms of relief from Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) that are relevant in the circumstances outlined by the Deputy.

The first, known as ‘agricultural relief’, may apply to reduce the taxable value of a gift or inheritance of agricultural property, including land, by 90% once certain conditions are satisfied. The second, referred to ‘favourite nephew’ (or ‘favourite niece’) relief, applies the highest Group A tax-free threshold for CAT liability, normally applied to gifts or inheritances between parents and children, to a niece or nephew in certain circumstances. Both reliefs may apply to the same gift or inheritance.

Agricultural relief

Section 89 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act (CATCA) 2003 provides for agricultural relief. The relief takes the form of a 90% reduction in the taxable value of the gifted or inherited agricultural property.

To qualify for the relief, the person taking the gift or inheritance (the ‘beneficiary’) of the agricultural property must qualify as a ‘farmer’ for the purpose of section 89 CATCA 2003. This means that a beneficiary’s agricultural property must comprise at least 80% by gross market value of the beneficiary’s total property at a particular date.

In addition, for gifts and inheritances taken on or after 1 January 2015, a beneficiary, or a lessee where the beneficiary leases the agricultural land, must actually farm the land on a commercial basis for a period of at least 6 years after taking the gift or inheritance. The holder of a ‘green certificate’ (of relevant education), while required to actually farm the land, is not subject to the requirement that he or she spends at least 50% of his or her normal working time doing this.

Favourite niece or nephew relief

The relationship between the person who provides the gift or inheritance (i.e. the disponer) and the beneficiary determines the threshold, known as the ‘Group threshold’, for the value of gifts or inheritances below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise. Any prior gift or inheritance received by a beneficiary since 5 December 1991 from within the same Group threshold is aggregated for the purposes of determining whether any tax is payable on the current benefit.

Ordinarily, a disponer’s nephew or niece is entitled to the Group B tax-free threshold of €32,500. However, a nephew or niece who has worked substantially on a full-time basis for a period of five years prior to the gift or inheritance in carrying on, or assisting in carrying on, a disponer’s trade, business or profession is entitled to the higher Group A tax-free threshold of €310,000.

The Deputy has not provided sufficient information to enable Revenue to give a definitive answer as to whether or not agricultural relief and/or ‘favourite nephew’ relief would apply in

the circumstances outlined. The uncle/nephew in question is advised to contact his local Revenue office with further information so that a definite answer can be obtained

Departmental Schemes

302. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department or a body under its aegis conducted research on the success of the living over the shop incentives schemes; the estimated costs of the different schemes since 1994; and the number of refurbishment projects and residential units created in each year under the schemes. [28264/17]

304. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department or a body under its aegis conducted research on the success of the living over the shop incentives schemes; the reason for the low number of residential units created under the schemes; and the detail of this research. [28267/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 302 and 304 together.

The Living over the Shop (LOTS) incentive was introduced in 2001 in the five city boroughs of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. It provided relief of 100 per cent for eligible expenditure on the refurbishment or conversion of under-utilised space for residential accommodation at a rate of 10 per cent per annum over 10 years, against total income. The incentive closed to new claimants in mid-2006.

The estimated total cost to the Exchequer of the scheme was some €48.7m and an estimated 440 residential units were delivered.

A review of various existing tax incentives was undertaken by my Department, in part internally and in part by Indecon and Goodbody Economic Consultants, and included an examination of the LOTS incentive. The review was published in three volumes in February 2006. Volume two, the Goodbody Review of Area Based Tax Incentive Renewal Schemes, sets out detailed statistics and findings in relation to the LOTS incentive (pp. 111-130).

- At paragraph 7.4.5, the report notes that between 2001 and mid-2006, the estimated cost to the Exchequer was some €35.5m.

- In addition, Revenue has advised me that between 2007 and 2014 (inclusive) the cost to the Exchequer was some €12.9m and in 2015 the provisional cost was some €0.3m.

- An estimated 440 residential units were delivered (paragraph 7.4.2).

At paragraph 7.6.2.1, the review identifies the following reasons for the relatively limited take-up of the LOTS incentive:

- The prospect of taking on an extensive refurbishment project may not have appealed to individuals whose primary occupation was in retail;

- The potential for disruption to the retail business for the duration of the development work may have dissuaded shopkeepers from developing their premises;

- Shopkeepers may have had to relinquish valuable retail or storage space to allow for access to the residential accommodation;

- There may have been security concerns associated with having tenants living above com-

mercial premises;

- A residential unit over a shop may not be attractive to potential tenants given the availability of alternative apartments in purpose built apartment blocks which may offer better facilities. For this reason it is also likely that above the shop units would not be attractive to owner-occupiers, leaving the developer dependent on rental income to provide a return on the investment;

- There were sometimes difficulties in marketing the Scheme due to problems in identifying owners as distinct from tenants of properties; and

- As the designated streets for this scheme were in city centre locations, they may not have been attractive places to live given the proximity of bars and night-clubs resulting in noise, litter and anti-social behaviour.

The review may be found at:

http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Taxrev2006vol2_0.pdf

Housing Issues

303. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the status of his Department's efforts to establish an off balance sheet mechanism to provide a housing investment fund for the purposes of significant housing development as promised under action 2.4 of rebuilding Ireland; the reason the timeline set down in Rebuilding Ireland has not been met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28265/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTMA have confirmed to my officials that it has not been possible to meet the deadline for the Rebuilding Ireland Action. Despite this in the social and affordable market, in line with Rebuilding Ireland commitments, the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and a number of key Government Departments are continuing to examine the feasibility of establishing a funding vehicle, in conjunction with the private sector, which could facilitate investment in social and affordable housing. The objective is to assess the feasibility of an 'off-balance' mechanism to facilitate investment in social housing which is additional to that being provided directly by the State and which does not impact on the General Government Balance.

Whilst a major objective of any such funding vehicle is to leverage additionality in terms of social housing supply, work to date indicates that a substantial portion of the overall supply of new units may need to be for private housing to meet the commerciality test and to satisfy the requirements of an off-balance sheet investment model.

Important preparatory work has been completed by ISIF in conjunction with my Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, CSO and Eurostat. As part of this process there have been clarifications on the balance sheet treatment of such a fund through discussions with Eurostat, the CSO and the EIB. Further detailed work is on-going in ISIF in relation to the commercial viability of such fund and in terms of identifying investable private sector opportunities and platforms to deliver on the potential in this area.

Question No. 304 answered with Question No. 302.

Tax Exemptions

305. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of exempting IREF funds from stamp duty on the transfer of shares; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28335/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Finance Act 2016 contained a number of measures in relation to IREFs, including Stamp Duty exemptions intended to facilitate the transfer of a business out of an IREF and into a legal structure in which it would be more normal to see such a business conducted.

These Stamp Duty exemptions are:

- Section 739V (5) of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, in respect of a transfer of the business of an IREF into a company before 1 July 2017, and

- Section 739W (6), in respect of a transfer of the property rental business of an IREF into a REIT before 31 December 2017.

These provisions provide for the new legal structure to step into the shoes of the IREF. As such, it was not anticipated that there would be any tax cost associated with these Stamp Duty exemptions.

These exemptions apply to the transfer of IREF assets, which broadly speaking are assets that derive their value from Irish property. While such assets may include shares that derive their value from Irish property, it is considered more likely that IREF assets are real property and loans that derive their value from Irish property.

There are other Stamp Duty exemptions pre-dating Finance Act 2016 that may be available to an IREF that comes within the meaning of “investment undertaking” in section 739B TCA 1997. These are:

- Section 88 Stamp Duties Consolidation Act (SDCA) 1999, in relation to transfers of stock and securities of investment undertakings.

- Section 88D SDCA 1999, in relation to the re-organisation of investment undertakings.

I am informed by Revenue that there is no requirement to file a Stamp Duty return in relation to the exemptions provided for by sections 739V and 739W TCA 1997 and sections 88 and 88D SDCA 1999. There is, therefore, no basis on which to provide a cost for such exemptions.

Tax Exemptions

306. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of exempting IREF funds from VAT on property management fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28336/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the information furnished on VAT returns does not require the yield from particular trades or activities to be separately identified, the VAT incurred on property management fees is not readily identifiable. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the cost of exempting IREF funds from VAT on property management fees.

The Deputy may wish to note that Irish VAT law provides that the management of an undertaking specified in paragraph 6(2) of Schedule 1 of the VAT Consolidation Act 2010 is an exempt activity. Paragraph 6(4) of Schedule 1 sets out that the management of that undertaking

can consist of “any one or more of the 3 functions listed in Annex II of Directive No. 85/611/EEC of the European Parliament and Council (being the functions included in the activity of collective portfolio management) where the relevant function is supplied by the person who has responsibility for carrying out that function in respect of the undertaking”. Annex II provides for a non-exhaustive list of the functions which are included in the activity of management of special investment funds and of investment companies. However, property management services are not included on that list.

Banking Sector

307. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the maximum percentage of a bank (details supplied) that may be sold in the planned forthcoming initial public offering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28351/17]

308. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he has set a minimum price per share and a minimum level of overall proceeds below which he will not proceed with the initial public offering of a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28352/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 307 and 308 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, on 12 June, the price range was announced for the sale of AIB shares by way of an Initial Public Offering on the Irish and London stock exchanges. The expected price range for the offer has been set at between €3.90 and €4.90 per Ordinary Share, implying a market capitalisation for AIB on admission of between approximately €10.6 billion and €13.3 billion.

The Program for a Partnership Government allows for the sale of not more than 25% of any bank before the end of 2018 (plus any over-allotment option). As such, the intention is to proceed with a sale of 25% of AIB (plus an over allotment option - which may facilitate liquidity and smooth trading in the first 30 days after flotation - equal to another 15% of the total number of shares sold in the offer). The Prospectus associated with the Initial Public Offer was published on 12 June and includes the following figures which might be of assistance to the Deputy:

- Number of Ordinary Shares in issue on Admission: 2,714,381,238
- Expected maximum number of Offer Shares in the Offer: 678,595,310
- Expected number of Offer Shares in the Offer as a percentage of total number of Ordinary Shares in existence on Admission: Up to 25%
- Expected maximum number of Over-allotment Shares: 101,789,296

Assuming the over allotment option is exercised in full, the shares sold by the State would represent 28.75% of the total number of shares in existence on admission.

The full prospectus can be found on the AIB Investor Relations website at the following link:

<https://aib.ie/investorrelations/ipo-information>

State Banking Sector

309. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the professional and consultancy fees incurred to date in 2017 in respect of the planned initial public offering of a bank (details supplied); the estimated overall cost of professional and consultancy fees likely to be incurred as part of the initial public offering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28353/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy should be aware that in line with the State agreements with AIB, all fees incurred by the State in relation to an IPO transaction will be paid by the bank.

Fees are only payable to the selling syndicate of nine investment banks on the completion of a successful transaction, and are proportional to the value of the transaction. As such it is not possible to provide an exact quantum of fees payable as no transaction has occurred yet. However the fees that have been negotiated by my officials are approximately 0.4% of the total transaction size. This is very competitive by reference to comparable transactions in Europe. The fee is split across all appointed syndicate banks and as such the number of firms involved (also within precedent), does not affect the overall fee level payable.

The prospectus published by AIB estimates the potential fee with the assumption that the shares are listed at the mid-point of the published price range, which gives an indicative figure of €12 million.

Fees will also be payable to our independent financial advisor, Rothschild & Sons, communications advisers Gordon MRM and Citigate Dewe Rogerson and our legal advisers, William Fry. Together with some other seller related and underwriter expenses, these fees are estimated in the prospectus to be approximately €4m.

As is normal practice, details of the fees paid by my Department to such parties are disclosed on an ongoing basis under the procurement section of the Department's website:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/who-we-are/financials/consultancy/consultancy/>

In addition to the above, AIB will also incur its own fees and expenses in relation to the initial public offering which include broker, corporate advisory, accounting and legal fees. These fees and expenses amount to €25m, are a matter for the board and management of AIB, and are borne by the company directly. Full details are disclosed as part of their published prospectus on p661. The prospectus is available on the AIB Investor Relations website at the following link:

<https://aib.ie/investorrelations/ipo-information>.

Financial Services Sector

310. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of losses incurred by ordinary individual investors in various funds (details supplied); his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28354/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the matters relating to certain property investment funds that the Deputy has raised, which my officials will continue to monitor.

However, as litigation relating to a number of funds, including those identified by the Dep-

uty, are currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

Tax Reliefs Data

311. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of projects utilising and the amount of tax relief claimed under section 481 film relief for each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28355/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that prior to 2015, the Film Relief scheme, provided for by Section 481 Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, operated by giving relief to individuals and companies investing in the film industry. The information in respect of the tax cost and number of investors who claimed relief under section 481 for the years 2004 to 2014 is available on the Revenue Commissioners webpage at

<http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx>.

With effect from 2015, the scheme provides direct support to film producer companies in the form of a tax credit. However, where an application was received up to and including 14 December 2014, it was processed under the previous scheme. Investors availing of the old scheme can choose the year in which to claim their relief. The provisional number of claimants of the tax credit in 2015 is 1,102 with a cost to the Exchequer of €69.7 million.

The following numbers of companies were granted relief during 2015, 2016 and 2017:

- 2015: 32 companies in respect of 43 films
- 2016: 54 companies in respect of 74 films
- 2017: 15 companies in respect of 21 films (to end Quarter 1 2017).

The information relating to the beneficiaries under the current scheme can be found at:

- 2015 beneficiaries: *<http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/documents/beneficiaries-tax-relief-2015.pdf>*

- 2016 beneficiaries: *<http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/documents/beneficiaries-tax-relief-2016.pdf>*

- 2017 (to Quarter 1) beneficiaries: *<http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/documents/beneficiaries-tax-relief-2017.pdf>*

Financial Services Sector

312. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of non-bank lending to the property sector in recent years; his plans to bring such non-bank lenders fully into the ambit of regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28356/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been informed by the Central Bank that it does not track data relating to unregulated non-bank lenders. However, the SME Credit Demand Survey, conducted on behalf of the Department, monitors the credit requirements of SMEs. The latest survey indicates that non-bank finance for SMEs is considerably lower than bank finance. For the period April to September 2016, the survey indicates that 8%

of SMEs sought non-bank finance, this represented an increase of 1% on the previous period.

Explicit data on entities who are not regulated by the Central Bank is not published routinely by the Central Bank and it is therefore not possible to provide the number and value requested by the Deputy.

I would however refer the Deputy to the Report on Mortgage Arrears which the Central Bank provided to the Minister for Finance in June 2016 <http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/publications/reports-research/report-mortgage-arrears-2016>

This provides details of the total number of loans/value of loans owned by unregulated entities as at the end of June 2016.

Loans can be sold by regulated entities to entities that are not regulated by the Central Bank. In July 2015, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing) Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) was introduced to fill the consumer protection gap where loans are sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm.

Under the 2015 Act, if the firm which bought loans from the original lender is an unregulated firm, then the loans must be serviced by a ‘credit servicing firm’ (Credit Servicing Firms are typically firms that manage or administer credit agreements such as mortgages or other loans on behalf of unregulated entities). Credit Servicing Firms are required to obtain authorisation from the Central Bank in order to conduct credit servicing activities as defined in the 2015 Act. A register of those firms who have notified the Central Bank that they wish to avail of the transitional provisions provided for in the legislation (whereby, by virtue of the 2015 Act, they are taken to be authorised to carry on the business of a credit servicing firm pending a decision on their application by the Central Bank) and those firms that have been authorised to carry on the business of a credit servicing firm is available on the Central Bank website.

Credit servicing firms must act in accordance with the requirements of Irish financial services law that applies to ‘regulated financial service providers’. This ensures that consumers, whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory Codes of Conduct issued by the Central Bank.

Mortgage Book Sales

313. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a bank (details supplied) has plans to sell a loan portfolio; the details of this portfolio; the timeframe for its sale; the details of other loan portfolio sales planned by the bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28357/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Significant progress has been made across the Irish banking sector in reducing the level of NPLs since the financial crisis. This has been primarily achieved by customers engaging directly with their banks and agreeing a sustainable payment plan which allows the customer an achievable path out of arrears, as well as protecting the value of the loan for the bank. In the vast majority of cases this achieves the best outcome for all involved.

Despite this progress, the level of NPLs in the Irish banking sector remains well above the European average. Hence the Single Supervisory Mechanism, as regulator for larger European banks, has tasked the management and board of each institution with developing and implementing a strategy to address this challenge. In recent years Irish banks have introduced

multiple engagement channels to facilitate those customers who are reluctant to engage directly with them. Having exhausted these initiatives, if meaningful engagement is not forthcoming from particular customers the bank may be left with no option but to look at alternative solutions which could, as a last resort, include the sale of the loan.

AIB has informed me that it has reduced its impaired loans to c. €8.6bn from a peak of c.€29bn over the past three years. The bank remains focused on reducing impaired loans to a level more in line with normalised European peer levels and will continue to implement sustainable solutions for customers who engage with the bank where feasible. AIB further informed me that the bank continues to review all options in relation to reducing impaired loans.

As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Finance I have no role in the day-to-day operations of any of the banks in which the State has a shareholding. The banks operate on an independent and commercial basis and therefore any decisions related to disposals or acquisitions of assets is a matter for the Board and management of each institution, under the terms set out in the relevant Relationship Frameworks.

Fiscal Policy

314. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if it is no longer his plan to provide for a rainy day fund in the years 2019 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28386/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of the 2016 Summer Economic Statement, the Government announced its intention to establish a contingency reserve/rainy day fund with effect from 2019. The crisis years clearly demonstrated that volatility in the economic cycle can be much more pronounced due to the open nature of the Irish economy. As such, the rainy day fund would provide a prudent counter-cyclical buffer, with annual transfers from the Exchequer to the rainy day fund expected following the achievement of the Medium Term Budgetary Objective, projected to be next year.

Following the recent change to the composition of the Government, the rainy day fund is currently under review. An update to the rainy day fund will be provided in the Summer Economic Statement 2017.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

315. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the approximate regulatory and administrative cost in addition to other potential costs of enabling the SBCI to lend directly to SMEs; and if he has explored the concept of relicensing the SBCI in order for it to develop branches for direct lending. [28399/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The strategic mission of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources. The SBCI achieves this aim through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk sharing activities supporting the provision of appropriately priced, flexible funding to SMEs.

The SBCI does not lend directly, rather, it lends through partner financial institutions, known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has 8 on-lenders, 3 bank and 5 non-bank finance providers.

Details of the SBCI on-lending partners are available at <http://sbci.gov.ie/on-lenders/>. To the end of March 2017, the SBCI has lent out €657 million to nearly 15,300 SMEs supporting the employment of over 67,000 people. SMEs in all sectors of the Irish economy benefit from SBCI finance. The majority of SBCI loans are used for investment purposes and SMEs supported by the SBCI are based in all regions of the country, with 85% of them outside Dublin.

The SBCI expects to announce further on-lenders in 2017. It also intends to build further on the risk-sharing aspect of its business model, allowing it to target new sections of the SME finance market and improve the risk appetite of partner finance providers. The SBCI will do this through its operation and management of the Credit Guarantee Scheme and through the use of European financial instruments, building on the success of the Agricultural Cashflow Support Loan Scheme, which was supported by a €100 million COSME facility from the EIF. This scheme has provided the SBCI with the proof of concept for risk sharing and now provides the opportunity to bring additional guarantee-backed products into the Irish market.

There would be significant cost implications associated with the SBCI changing its on-lending model to direct lending as well as regulatory, competition and resourcing issues that would need to be addressed. A suitable distribution model would also be required. From a policy perspective, the SBCI is not intended to be a bank and its role as a National Promotional Institution is quite different from a bank and does not require direct lending. The SBCI takes a market neutral approach; its activities are largely driven by market demands and needs that are not fully met by the private sector with the aim of improving competition. The SBCI is working to develop a more diverse range of on-lenders and innovative products to meet the evolving requirements of the SME finance market and contribute to a sustainable economy.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

316. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to update the classification of mortgage arrears cases by the number of days to provide more detail particularly for those in arrears up to 90 days and those in arrears over 720 days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28415/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank publishes updates on the Mortgage Arrears and Repossession figures with a significant amount of detail. The most recent set of statistics was published on 8 June 2017.

<https://www.centralbank.ie/news/article/residential-mortgage-arrears-and-repossessions-statistics-q1-2017>

While the Central Bank collects some additional breakdown on the up to 90 days in arrears category, these breakdowns can be affected by technical issues, mainly to do with timing, which can cause volatility in the series (e.g. reporting for bank holiday weekends, reporting of loan transfer factors and clearing of arrears from longer-term categories). Therefore, the Central Bank does not publish breakdowns for less than 90 days.

It is important to note that these same factors can also feature for the up to 90 days in arrears category, albeit to a much more limited extent. The Central Bank does not have any further breakdown on over 720 days in arrears category.

Fiscal Compact Treaty

317. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a review is under way or planned by the European Commission on the European fiscal rules; if he has raised the possibility of such a review with the Council of European Finance Ministers; if the State has made submissions in this respect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28416/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am currently unaware of any review underway or planned by the European Commission on the European Fiscal Rules. Nor have I raised the possibility of such a review with the Council of European Finance Ministers.

However, changes are made on a regular basis to both the operation of the fiscal rules and the methodology used to assess compliance, particularly in relation to the expenditure benchmark. These changes result from the raising of issues by Member States or in response to proposals from the Commission on its own initiative. For instance, as the Deputy is aware and as outlined in Parliamentary Question number 72 of the 1st of June 2017, I sought and secured a major change from the Commission in achieving an annual update of the reference rate used in the expenditure benchmark. This change applied to all Member States.

Furthermore my Department is currently engaging, on a bilateral basis, with the European Commission to object to the retrospective application of the inclusion of one-offs in the calculation of compliance with the expenditure benchmark for 2016 and the 2016/2017 average. This update to the methodology, which was agreed in late 2016, was set out in the 2017 version of the Vade Mecum on the Stability and Growth Pact.

However the 2017 version of the Vade Mecum itself states that “in order to preserve Member States’ legitimate expectations, compliance with already adopted Council recommendations will continue to be assessed on the basis of methodologies described in the 2016 version of the Vade Mecum.” My officials have raised this at European level and the Commission have admitted that there may be legal uncertainty with the approach taken its assessment methodology.

Insurance Compensation Fund

318. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the financial position of the Insurance Compensation Fund; the insurance levy revenue for 2016 and 2017; the payouts from the fund in 2016 and to date in 2017; the deficit or surplus which is on the fund; the amount owed to the exchequer by way of loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28417/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that the following represents the current financial position of the Insurance Compensation Fund:

-	Amount
Insurance levy revenue received in 2016	€73.28m
Insurance levy revenue received to date in 2017	€20.75m
Repayments of amounts advanced under Section 5(1) of the 1964 Insurance Act by the Minister of Finance on the recommendation of the Central Bank in 2016	€106.61m
Section 3 Payments in respect of first party Setanta claimants in 2016	€608,085k
The current deficit on the ICF	€811.25m
The amount owed to the exchequer by way of loans	€833.74m

There have been no repayments of amounts advanced under Section 5(1) of the 1964 Insur-

ance Act by the Minister of Finance on the recommendation of the Central Bank to date in 2017.

There have been no Section 3 Payments in respect of first party Setanta claimants to date in 2017. However, a number of such payments are due to be made shortly.

Fiscal Policy

319. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to undertake a fiscal stress test as has been done in other jurisdictions such as the UK; the details of such a test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28421/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department prepares and publishes a risk and sensitivity analysis around the macroeconomic and fiscal forecasts on a biannual basis. The most recent sensitivity analysis was published as part of the 2017 Stability Programme Update (SPU) and included two illustrative scenarios:

1. The impact of a 1 per cent decrease in world output
2. The impact of a 1 per cent interest rate increase

The first scenario would worsen the deficit-to-GDP ratio with the effect reaching 0.2 pp relative to baseline after five years. The second scenario would worsen the deficit-to-GDP ratio with the effect reaching 0.3 pp relative to baseline after five years. Further details on the impact of these shocks can be found in the link below.

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/170502%20Final%20SPU%202017.pdf>

Turning to debt developments the recently published Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland indicates that subject to the baseline scenario of continued economic growth, Ireland's debt-to-GDP ratio should be below the EU threshold of 60 per cent in the early part of the next decade.

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/news-centre/press-releases/department-finance-annual-report-public-debt-ireland-2017>

However in analysing our debt sustainability, a range of hypothetical shocks are applied to this baseline position, specifically a GDP shock; an interest rate shock and an extreme scenario involving a very sharp deterioration in the GDP growth rate together with a fiscal shock. The analysis suggests that the debt-to-GDP trajectory is very sensitive to nominal output growth.

Whilst on a headline basis our debt-to-GDP ratio is suggestive of an improving debt burden, this must be treated with caution due to the distortions in our GDP level. Accordingly, ensuring continued fiscal sustainability by reducing both the outstanding debt level and burden must remain a priority. Policy must be aligned to this objective and target a balanced budget along with using windfall gains to retire debt, as is Government policy.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Eligibility

320. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider allowing old age pensioners to avail of the home renovation incentive scheme; if he will consider developing a similar scheme for old age pensioners to avail from to make improvements to their household; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28520/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit on repair, renovation or improvements works on principal private residences or rental properties carried out by tax compliant contractors. HRI came into operation on 25 October 2013, with rental properties being brought within its scope from 15 October 2014. The scheme is scheduled to run until 31 December 2018.

The incentive is already available to all taxpayers, including pensioners, but as is the nature of tax-based incentive schemes, the taxpayer in question needs to have a sufficient tax liability to obtain the benefit of the additional tax credit. The Deputy will be aware that those aged 65 and over are treated more favourably by the tax system with the availability of additional tax credits and increased exemption limits, which can act to reduce or nullify any tax liability.

The development of a similar measure that would benefit old-age pensioners who are outside the income tax net would involve direct expenditure and therefore would be outside the ambit of my Department's vote.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Funding

321. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Finance if the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland allocates money for renewable projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28556/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's National Promotional Institution for SMEs and its strategic mission is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources.

The SBCI began lending in March 2015 and it is very encouraging to note the SBCI's strong lending figures. To the end of March 2017, the SBCI has lent out €657 million to 15,293 SMEs supporting the employment of over 67,000 people. SMEs in all sectors of the Irish economy benefit from SBCI finance, including manufacturing, agriculture, food, retail, healthcare, transport and construction. The majority of SBCI loans are used for investment purposes and SMEs supported by the SBCI are based in all regions of the country, with 85% of them outside Dublin.

The SBCI does not lend directly. Rather, the SBCI provides appropriately priced, flexible funding to SMEs via its partner finance providers, known as on-lenders, through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk sharing activities. The SBCI currently has three bank and five non-bank on-lenders: AIB; Bank of Ireland; Ulster Bank; Merrion Fleet; First Citizen Finance; Finance Ireland; Bibby Financial Services Ireland and FEXCO Asset Finance.

As SBCI lending is done through on-lenders, loan applicants must comply with the on-lenders credit policies and procedures. Where they meet the credit criteria of the SBCI's on-lenders, renewable projects may be supported by SBCI funding. However, the SBCI does not specifically allocate money for renewable projects.

The SBCI's lending to SMEs is largely driven by market demands and needs that are not fully met by the private sector. The Deputy can rest assured that the SBCI is working to develop a more diverse range of on-lenders and innovative products to meet the evolving requirements of the SME finance market and contribute to a sustainable economy.

322. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons affected by the tracker mortgage investigation at each of the banks involved in specifying the numbers identified as possible victims; the number of customers to date contacted each bank; the number that have had their case closed with redress and compensation paid at each bank; the timeframe in which all affected persons will have their case closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28616/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank have advised that the information that the Deputy has requested is lender specific supervisory information and the Central Bank is not in a position to comment on individual lenders due to confidentiality requirements under Central bank legislation.

However, in the most recent update on the Examination published by the Central Bank on March 23, certain data in relation to the Examination was released. This included the following:

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

- that lenders had commenced contacting impacted customers identified as at end February 2017 and rectified the interest rates on more than 90% of accounts requiring rectification.

The Central Bank also invoked its powers under Section 22 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 to set specific timelines for lenders to complete Phase 2 of the Examination, the last of which will be completed by no later than end September 2017. By this date, the Central Bank expects all lenders to have identified all impacted accounts and have commenced engagement with most impacted customers. The Central Bank will be rigorously monitoring the completion of this work.

A further progress update on the Examination will be issued by the Central Bank in Autumn 2017.

Fiscal Policy

323. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the decision that additional allocation for funding to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to enable recovery and repair on the road network in January 2016 was allowed under fiscal rules in view of the fact that it was initially his Department's position that such a request for additional funding arising from storm damage could not be catered for under the fiscal rules (details supplied). [28641/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In terms of the performance public expenditure management in 2016, it should be noted that the provisional outturn (adjusting for Capital Carryover) for total gross voted expenditure was €55,980 million compared to the projection in REV 2016. This represents an over profile amount of less than 0.25% of total gross voted expenditure, highlighting the strict control of the overall level of public expenditure in the course of 2016.

Within this a number of additional current and capital expenditure priorities were met. As the Deputy mentions, these included a larger capital allocation for road repairs in response to flooding damage at the beginning of 2016. This had been previously highlighted in both the Summer Economic Statement and Mid-Year Expenditure Report, and could be accommodated with the fiscal rules. This follows technical revisions to the 2015 expenditure base by Eurostat in relation to the statistical treatment of an AIB-related share transaction. This in turn provided

an additional buffer for the calculation of Ireland's compliance with the expenditure benchmark last year.

Eurostat's decision to classify the AIB transaction as expenditure was only taken in April 2016 during the clarification process on the end-March 2016 Maastricht Returns.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

324. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28669/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, there are eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department of which I am advised that eleven are designated as State Bodies for the purpose of the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. With respect to these eleven bodies, please see the information requested in the following table:

Body	Report furnished confirming compliance with obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies	Action taken
Credit Reviewer	No. Enterprise Ireland (EI) processes all payments for the Credit Review Office (CRO). EI are fully tax compliant with regard to all payments made on behalf of the CRO.	N/A
Credit Union Advisory Committee	The Credit Union Advisory Committee does not have a tax obligation as its expenditure is accounted for by the Department of Finance.	N/A
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	2015 Report furnished to the Department of Finance. Awaiting Comptroller & Auditor General sign off on ReBo 2016 accounts.	N/A
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal	The Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal has no tax obligations of its own so there is no obligation on them to report their compliance.	N/A
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	Yes	N/A
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	Yes	N/A
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	Yes	N/A
National Asset Management Agency	Yes	N/A
National Treasury Management Agency	The NTMA Tax Compliance Review Report in respect of 2015 has been provided to the Department of Finance. The 2016 Report is currently being finalised and will be provided to the Department, once available.	N/A
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	Yes, 2015 report furnished to Department of Finance. The 2016 report is not yet complete and will be furnished to the Department of Finance in due course.	N/A

Questions - Written Answers

Body	Report furnished confirming compliance with obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies	Action taken
Tax Appeals Commissioners	The Tax Appeals Commission has not submitted a report confirming its obligations under tax law in respect of 2016. This matter will be raised at the upcoming Liaison Group meeting.	The Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) was established in 2016 and there has been significant progress made during the transition period in terms of its governance arrangements. It has recently published its annual report and has submitted its appropriation accounts as required. It has also published its governance arrangements on its website. Consistent with the governance arrangements for bodies under the aegis of the Department of Finance, a liaison group has been established between the Department and the TAC and the first meeting took place in April 2017 with the second meeting due to take place later this week.

Mortgage Interest Relief Data

325. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the impact on the net fiscal space for 2018 of retaining mortgage interest relief; his plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28684/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): If the Government decides in Budget 2018 to retain Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) on the same basis it currently applies, this would be neutral in fiscal space terms. However I should point out that in Budget 2017 the Government confirmed its intention to extend MIR beyond the current end-date of December 2017 on a tapered basis to 2020, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government. This policy intention will be reviewed, along with the potential impact on fiscal space, as part of the Budget 2018 process.

A review of policy considerations relevant to a range of potential options for the tapered extension of the relief was contained in the Income Tax Reform Plan published by my Department in July last year and may be of interest to the Deputy. The plan is available at: http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/Income%20Tax%20Reform%20Plan-FINAL_0.pdf

Public Sector Pay

326. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the recently agreed public sector pay deal will be counted as investment in public spending under the confidence and supply agreement that there will be a two to one ratio between investment in public spending and tax cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28685/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On the 8 June 2017, the terms of a proposed agreement was reached between the public service unions and public service management officials representing the Government, regarding an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

If the proposed agreement is ratified by the unions and representative associations for pub-

lic servants, then the expenditure will use fiscal space. However, I should point out that the confidence and supply arrangement specifies that the ratio in favour of expenditure is “at least” two to one. The Government will decide on budgetary policy for 2018 in the context of Budget 2018.

Tax Reliefs Costs

327. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of a suggested measure (details supplied). [28708/17]

333. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of a measure (details supplied), in tabular form. [28735/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 327 and 333 together.

The cost to the Exchequer of an income tax, USC and/or PRSI relief on interest earned from the supply of crowdfunding finance to SMEs would depend on a number of factors, including the marginal USC rate and the PRSI Class of the individual investors concerned; the level of investment; the level of return received on the investment (i.e. the interest rate received); and the level of uptake of the relief. As such it is not possible to estimate an overall Exchequer cost for the measure proposed by the Deputy.

Should the Deputy wish to estimate a cost for such a measure using projections for uptake and return, the Exchequer cost per €10,000 of interest received of allowing an exemption from USC, PRSI and income tax at the standard rate (assuming that the individual’s total income is such that the interest income received would be subject to income tax and that PRSI at Class K or Class S would apply), would be as follows:

-	Cost
Investor with total income below €70,044	€2,900 (20% income tax, 5% USC, 4% PRSI)
Investor with total income between €70,044 and €100,000	€3,200 (20% income tax, 8% USC, 4% PRSI)
Investor with non-PAYE income exceeding €100,000	€3,500 (20% income tax, 11% USC, 4% PRSI)

Deputy Collins will be aware that Crowdfunding is not currently a regulated activity in Ireland and, in June 2014, the Central Bank of Ireland issued an information notice that alerts consumers to this fact and highlights specific risks that potential investors should be aware of. There is no dedicated harmonised regulation for crowdfunding in the European Union and the existing European financial services legislation was not designed with crowdfunding in mind.

A number of EU Member States have either implemented domestic regulation for crowdfunding or are in the process of considering introducing regulation and my Department and the SME State Bodies Group are considering how to facilitate the development of crowdfunding in Ireland for the benefit of the economy while also ensuring adequate protection for small investors and consumers. As part of this process a public consultation was held in May/June seeking the views of interested parties on whether a regulatory regime would be appropriate for the crowdfunding sector, or if such a regime (or limited regime) with its inherent obligations and costs would be an impediment to the development of crowdfunding in Ireland.

Tax Reliefs Application

328. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding health insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28709/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Considerations relating to the cost of hospital admissions are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health, Mr. Simon Harris T.D. With regard to tax relief for medical insurance premiums, income tax relief is provided at the standard rate of income tax, currently 20%, and is restricted to the first €1,000 per adult and the first €500 per child insured. Any portion of premium paid in excess of these ceilings no longer qualifies for tax relief.

The ceilings on the premium values qualifying for tax relief were introduced in Budget 2014 as the cost of the tax relief had increased significantly in the years leading up to this change. The Exchequer cost was €404 million in 2011, €448 million in 2012 and was projected to reach €500 million in 2013 if no policy change were made. Furthermore, despite the increasing cost of the relief, the numbers insured were estimated to have reduced by approximately 170,000 over the same period, while at the same time the level of medical cover decreased on some policies. Against this background the increase in costs was unsustainable.

The ceilings introduced in Budget 2014 ensure a level of continuing support via the tax system for those who purchase medical insurance policies, while reducing Exchequer exposure to more expensive policies. The relief is provided at source, which ensures that individuals on lower incomes can receive the full benefit of the available relief.

The Commission on Taxation in its 2009 report recommended the retention of medical insurance relief but that it should be limited. I am satisfied that the introduction of an upper ceiling on the amount of a medical insurance premium that can qualify for tax relief achieves this recommendation, and it is not intended at this time to revert to a system of unlimited tax relief.

Insurance Industry Regulation

329. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to an issue (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28723/17]

330. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance if adjustments companies such as a company (details supplied) are required to facilitate the special needs of the disabled; the State measures which exist to discourage excessively aggressive claim management by loss adjusters and insurers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28724/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 329 and 330 together.

As Minister for Finance, I have responsibility for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation in Ireland, including the regulatory environment for life and non-life insurance. The legal and regulatory framework for the provision of life insurance, non-life insurance and reinsurance in the European Economic Area (EEA), and the supervision of that activity, is prescribed by EU Directives. Insurance companies that operate in this jurisdiction must therefore operate under those requirements. Consequently, it would not be appropriate for me to provide a comment in relation to the companies in question. It should also be noted that requirements set out under equality legislation are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

You should be aware that the Central Bank of Ireland has two specific mandates as regards insurance supervision. Firstly, it is responsible for the prudential supervision of insurance companies it has authorised by seeking to ensure that such firms remain solvent. Secondly, the Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for the supervision of conduct of business in Ireland, also referred to as consumer protection.

In relation to your question, the Central Bank has informed me that its Consumer Protection Code 2012 requires that regulated entities:

- must ensure that in all dealings with customers and within the context of their authorisation, they act honestly, fairly and professionally in the best interests of their customers and the integrity of the market;

- must also act with due skill, care and diligence in the best interests of its customers, and must not exert undue pressure or undue influence on a customer;

- must ensure that in all its dealings with customers and within the context of its authorisation, it makes full disclosure of all relevant material information, including all charges, in a way that seeks to inform the customer;

- must ensure that any outsourced activity also complies with the requirements of the Code;

- must ensure that any claim settlement offer is fair, taking into account all relevant factors, and represents the regulated entity's best estimate of the claimant's reasonable entitlement under the policy; and

- must be available to discuss all aspects of the claim with the claimant, including assessment of liability and damages, during normal office hours, or outside of these hours if agreed with the claimant.

Furthermore, the Code requires that where a regulated entity engages the services of a loss adjuster and/or expert appraiser it must notify the claimant of the contact details of the loss adjuster and/or expert appraiser it has appointed to assist in the processing of the claim and the regulated entity must maintain a record of this notification.

In addition, Section 3.1 of the Code states that; "Where a regulated entity has identified that a personal consumer is a vulnerable consumer, the regulated entity must ensure that the vulnerable consumer is provided with such reasonable arrangements and/or assistance that may be necessary to facilitate him or her in his or her dealings with the regulated entity." It defines a vulnerable customer as follows: A "vulnerable consumer" means a natural person who:

- a) has the capacity to make his or her own decisions but who, because of individual circumstances, may require assistance to do so (for example, hearing impaired or visually impaired persons); and/or

- b) has limited capacity to make his or her own decisions and who requires assistance to do so (for example, persons with intellectual disabilities or mental health difficulties).

Finally, although I am not in a position to comment on individual cases, if a policyholder is dissatisfied with the service received from an insurance company, he/she should, according to the Financial Services Ombudsman's Bureau, initially submit a complaint in writing to the company itself and then go through its complaint handling process to conclusion – for more details see link below:

<https://www.financialombudsman.ie/complaints-process/default.asp?m=1>

Question No. 330 answered with Question No. 329.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

331. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of adapting the employment and investment incentive (details supplied), in tabular form. [28733/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The table sets out the cost to the exchequer (per investment) of a 30% relief for investors in the Employment and Investment Incentive at each of the investment points identified by the Deputy, assuming that the investor has a sufficient income tax liability to avail of the relief in full.

Amount €	Tax Cost €	Additional Cost Over Existing Ceiling €
150,000	50,000	-
200,000	60,000	10,000
300,000	90,000	40,000
400,000	120,000	70,000
500,000	150,000	100,000
600,000	180,000	130,000
700,000	210,000	160,000
800,000	240,000	190,000
900,000	270,000	220,000
1,000,000	300,000	250,000
1,100,000	330,000	280,000
1,200,000	360,000	310,000
1,300,000	390,000	340,000

As data in relation to the number of investors who might increase relevant investments, or who might make investments which are not currently made, is unavailable, it is not possible to project an overall potential cost for the increased thresholds proposed.

The Deputy may be interested to note that the level of investments made under the incentive has increased significantly in recent years, rising from €13.4 million in 2012 to €108.5 million in 2016. Detailed statistics on the take up of the scheme, the level of investments made, and the costs are available on the Revenue website at:

<http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/tax-expenditures/eii-stats-2012-2016.pdf>.

Exchequer Returns

332. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of a measure (details supplied), in tabular form. [28734/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that sections 766 and 766A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for a tax credit in respect of qualifying expenditure on Research & Development (“R&D”).

The R&D tax credit must be used initially to reduce the Corporation Tax liability of the company for the accounting period in which the relevant expenditure is incurred. Any unused amount may be carried forward and used to reduce the Corporation Tax of following accounting periods. However where an excess remains, instead of carrying forward that excess, a company may claim to use it to reduce the Corporation Tax of the preceding accounting period. If any excess still remains it may still be carried forward and used to reduce the Corporation Tax of succeeding accounting periods. In the event that there is no Corporation Tax liability in the current year, the company may claim to have the amount of that excess paid to them by Revenue in 3 instalments over a period of 33 months from the end of the accounting period in which the expenditure was incurred.

I understand that the Deputy is enquiring about the cost of an automatic refund of the tax credit, up to €70,000, in the case of a company which has already produced audited accounts.

I am advised by Revenue, that due to the manner in which it is refunded, any cost associated with changes to the credit as set out by the Deputy would merely reflect a timing difference in the cost rather than any additional cost to the Exchequer and it is not possible to accurately estimate the effect of the proposal.

Question No. 333 answered with Question No. 327.

Construction Industry

334. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount of finance for residential and commercial construction that is coming from non-domestic sources and from UK investment companies and financial institutions, in particular; his views on whether this non-domestic and non-banking finance could be put at risk from Brexit. [28811/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Neither the Central Bank of Ireland nor the Department of Finance tracks the amount of finance from non-domestic and non-banking investment companies investing in the Irish construction sector.

However, the SME Credit Demand Survey, conducted on behalf of the Department, monitors the overall credit requirements of SMEs. As the Deputy will be aware, SMEs account for 99.5 per cent of all active enterprises in Ireland. The latest survey indicates that non-bank finance for SMEs remains considerably lower than bank finance. For the period April to September 2016, the survey indicates that 8% of SMEs sought non-bank finance, this represented an increase of 1% on the previous period.

The recently published Trends in Business Credit and Deposits: Q1 2017 by the Central Bank shows that gross new lending to property-related SMEs reached €1.3 billion over the past twelve months, €353 million higher than the previous period. Drawdowns for property-related loans accounted for 24 per cent of total gross drawdowns.

Separately, the Deputy may also wish to note that the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) has been actively involved in a number of important initiatives which enhance the availability of finance to the construction sector in line with the terms of the Fund's mandate. This includes its investments in:

- **Activate Capital** - which is an innovative non-bank financing platform that has the potential to provide funding for substantial numbers of new homes in Dublin and the other major urban centres in which demand is most pronounced;

- **Ardstone** - Residential Partnership - which is a residential equity investment fund that is focused on delivering residential units to the market over the short-to medium-term; and

- **Wilbur Ross Cardinal Commercial Real Estate Mezzanine Debt Fund** - which has funded a number of residential developments in recent months.

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

The Government's position paper of 2 May 2017, sets out Ireland's approach to the EU-UK negotiations, including the economic implications. In relation to the future relationship between the EU and UK, Ireland wants to maintain the closest possible trading relationship, based on a level playing field, between the EU and the UK. The Government will continue to engage with EU partners to ensure that Ireland's concerns and priorities continue to be reflected in the EU's negotiating position as it evolves.

Tax Code

335. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration has been given to a proposal by groups (details supplied) to allocate a percentage of the tax raised from betting to be used to fund gambling addiction treatment and prevention programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28814/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Hypothecation is not a feature of the Irish tax system in general. I am not in favour of hypothecation of revenue receipts as it reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary at a particular time.

All revenues collected by the state should go to the Exchequer.

Vehicle Registration

336. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance if he will instruct the Revenue Commissioners to apply a temporary exemption from VRT to employees working for an organisation (details supplied) in Northern Ireland that reside here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28848/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 135 of Finance Act 1992, as amended, provides that a State resident in possession of a motor vehicle provided to him or her by an employer in Northern Ireland must register the vehicle in Ireland unless the vehicle is used principally for business purposes in Northern Ireland. Revenue has also informed me that the Tax Appeal Commission recently confirmed Revenue's position on this matter in an appeal case.

The Deputy will appreciate that the administration of VRT and decisions in individual cases requiring vehicles to be registered in the State are exclusively a matter for Revenue.

Appointments to State Boards

337. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appointments made to the boards of State bodies under the remit of his Department in May and June 2017; the dates of the appointments; the State bodies involved; the application process that was followed; the number of vacancies left on the boards of State bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28859/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I have been advised that there have been no appointments made to the boards of the eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department in May and June 2017. There are currently two vacancies on the board of the Central Bank Commission and two vacancies on the board of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA).

With respect to the Central Bank Commission, Section 18CA(1)(b) of the Central Bank Act 1942, as amended, provides that the Central Bank Commission comprises of at least 6, but no more than 8, members appointed by the Minister for Finance. The Commission currently comprises of 6 members with discretion to appoint 2 additional members.

With respect to NAMA, Section 19(1) of the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009 provides that the NAMA Board comprises of 7 members appointed by the Minister for Finance. The Chief Executive Officer of NAMA and the Chief Executive of the NTMA are ex-officio members. Section 24(3) provides that subject to this Act, NAMA may act notwithstanding one or more vacancies among the members of the Board. The two current vacancies may be filled as and when deemed appropriate.

Tax Code

338. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the revenue standing in relation to children of a first marriage (details supplied); his further views on whether potential changes to the law could be made to give children from the first marriage equal standing in terms of inheritance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28924/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that for inheritance tax purposes, the relationship between the deceased (i.e. the disponent) and the person who receives the inheritance (i.e. the beneficiary) determines the maximum amount known as the "Group threshold" below which inheritance tax does not arise.

There are three separate Group thresholds based on the relationship of the beneficiary to the disponent. The Group A threshold (currently €310,000) applies, inter alia, where the beneficiary is a child (including adopted child, step-child and certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the disponent. Therefore, there is no difference between the tax-free threshold that applies to any child, including a step-child from a previous marriage or civil partnership.

In the circumstances, children from a first marriage or civil partnership have equal standing in terms of inheritance tax to children from a subsequent marriage or civil partnership and I do not see any need to amend the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003, which Act provides for inheritance tax.

Addiction Treatment Services

339. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of funds made available for gambling addiction prevention and-or treatment services in the past three years and to date in 2017; if he will, in the context of the tax strategy group review on betting duty, consider provisions for funding for gambling addiction prevention and or treatment services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28925/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Tax Strategy Group Review on betting duty focuses on recent developments in this area, including the extension of the tax regime to remote operators, and looks at the potential for revenue raising in that sector.

The funding of addiction prevention and treatment services is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health. In this regard, I am not in favour of hypothecation of revenue receipts as it reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary at a particular time.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

340. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to a disclosure by NAMA of non-competitive procurement in 2016 to the value of €3.5 million; if his attention has been further drawn to other similar disclosures by NAMA or the NTMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28947/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, under the revised Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies (“the Code”), each State Body is required to report non competitive procurements in the Chairperson’s comprehensive report to the Minister. The NAMA Chairman submitted his comprehensive report in conjunction with the NAMA Annual Report for 2016, as required by the Code.

I would point out that the information cited in the Deputy’s Questions is publicly available in NAMA’s Statement of Internal Control, which is contained in NAMA’s 2016 Annual Report (pgs.68-69). NAMA’s 2016 Annual Report was published on 1 June 2017 and is available via: <https://www.nama.ie/about-us/publications/annual-reports/>.

NAMA submits the NAMA Annual Report to the Minister for Finance who in turn provides the Annual Report to Government for information prior to its publication. This allows the Minister for Finance, his officials and members of Government to familiarise themselves with the detail of the report as it enters the public domain. NAMA’s 2016 Annual Report was submitted and published in line with this established practice. Though NAMA’s 2016 Annual Report was published prior to me taking office, NAMA made this disclosure in the ordinary course through the NAMA 2016 Annual Report, which was brought to the attention of the Minister for Finance as required.

The NAMA Chief Executive Officer approved derogations from NAMA’s procurement policy to a total contract value of €3.5m in 2016 (2015: €3.4m). Of this total, €2.3m relates to derogations where existing procurement framework panels, previously established by tender with established hourly rates, were already in place. In such cases a service provider was directly appointed from the existing framework panel without a mini-tender process (2015: €1.9m). The remaining derogations totaling €1.2m (2015: €1.5m) relate to the direct appointment of service providers where no such panels were in place and are each permitted exceptions under the NAMA Procurement Policy.

I welcome the significant detail regarding these derogations provided in NAMA’s Statement of Internal Control. NAMA advise that the rationale for any derogation is considered and

approved by the Chief Executive Officer and reported to the Finance and Operating Committee. Derogations over a certain value are also approved by the Board. A breakdown of procurement policy derogations is provided within the Statement of Internal Control on page 69 of NAMA's 2016 Annual Report.

More generally, NAMA has an established and Board approved Procurement Policy and Procurement Guidance and Procedures based on relevant procurement legislation and best practice. NAMA adheres to these aforementioned policies and procedures in undertaking all procurement activity.

It is important to note that the use of derogations does not amount to non-compliance with NAMA's procurement policy as derogations are permitted in certain circumstances. Given that NAMA operates in a commercial environment and must maintain its commercial competitiveness, NAMA allow for alternative processes which seek to provide optimum value for money from its procurements while taking account of a number of other factors including, inter alia, efficiencies gained from the use of panels, confidentiality, conflicts of interest and timelines for delivery of services. In certain instances, as provided for in NAMA's Procurement Policy, it is deemed appropriate to obtain duly authorised derogations from NAMA's procurement policy for highly sensitive, confidential matters, where there are conflicts of interest issues, for expediency or where the service providers have prior existing knowledge of the debtor/asset (the latter of which can result in cost saving benefits).

Separately, I expect the NTMA to publish the NTMA 2016 Annual Report in the coming weeks.

Corporation Tax Regime

341. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount and percentage of corporation tax receipts which were paid by the top ten and 20 multinational groups respectively in each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28956/17]

342. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount and percentage of overall corporation tax receipts paid by the multinational sector in each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28957/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 341 and 342 together.

In relation to Question 28956/17, I am advised that the estimated net Corporation Tax receipts paid by the top 10 and the top 20 multinational groups in each of the years 2010 to 2016 are as shown in the table below.

Year	Top 10 Multinational Groups Net Corporation Tax Receipts €m	% of Net Corporation Tax Receipts	Top 20 Multinational Groups Net Corporation Tax Receipts €m	% of Net Corporation Tax Receipts
2010	1,438	36.4%	1,843	46.7%
2011	1,659	47.4%	2,026	57.9%
2012	1,482	35.2%	1,910	45.3%
2013	1,696	39.7%	2,194	51.4%
2014	1,961	42.5%	2,381	51.6%

Year	Top 10 Multinational Groups Net Corporation Tax Receipts €m	% of Net Corporation Tax Receipts	Top 20 Multinational Groups Net Corporation Tax Receipts €m	% of Net Corporation Tax Receipts
2015	3,155	45.9%	3,771	54.9%
2016	2,957	40.2%	3,694	50.2%

In respect of Question 28957/17, I am informed by Revenue that they are in the process of enhancing their data in respect of the share of Corporation Tax associated with both foreign owned and Irish owned multinational companies. When completed over the coming months, this exercise should improve the accuracy of data produced in respect of multinational tax. Detailed information on this is not presently available. However, the Deputy may wish to note that the enhancements to date indicate that the share of Corporation Tax receipts for the years in question is generally around 80 per cent for foreign owned multinational companies.

Tax Data

343. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of decreasing the standard rate of PAYE by 1% and 2% respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28984/17]

344. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of decreasing the higher rate of PAYE by 1% and 2% respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28985/17]

345. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of decreasing each of the rates of universal social charge by 0.25%, 0.5%, 0.75% and 1% respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28986/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 343 to 345, inclusive, together.

Regarding the Deputy's two questions regarding reductions in the standard and higher rate of PAYE by 1% and 2%, it is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the standard and higher rates of income tax overall rather than the rates of income tax for PAYE employment income only.

I am advised by Revenue that a Post-Budget 2017 Ready Reckoner is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>. The Deputy may be interested in page 5 of the Ready Reckoner which shows the cost to the Exchequer of decreasing the income tax rates by 1%. Other decreases can be estimated on a straight line basis from the figures published.

In relation to the Exchequer cost of decreasing USC rates, page 5 of the Ready Reckoner also shows a wide range of detailed information, including the estimated cost or yield to the Exchequer of changes to the Universal Social Charge (USC) bands and rates. While the Ready Reckoner does not show all of the specific costings requested by the Deputy, others can be estimated on a pro-rata basis with those displayed in the Reckoner. For example, the full year cost of decreasing the 2.5% USC rate to 1.5% is estimated to be €159 million. Other decreases can be estimated on a straight line basis.

Departmental Staff Relocation

346. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29038/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that there are a few ways for staff to apply for a transfer to other Departments and Offices including applying directly to the Department/Office and applying for a “Head to Head” transfer through their Union Magazine. My Department would not be aware of such applications.

In 2015 three of my staff based in my Department in Dublin applied to be transferred to my Department’s Tullamore Office. One staff member has since transferred to my Department’s Office in Tullamore and another member of staff transferred to the Payroll Shared Services Centre in Tullamore, both at no additional cost to the Exchequer.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform conducted a pilot of a Service Wide Mobility Scheme in a limited number of locations earlier this year. It is hoped Phase 1 of the Scheme will be launched some time in Q3 2017. My Department will then be aware of any transfer applications made through that forum for staff at Executive Officer and Clerical Officer level.

Departmental Staff Data

347. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form. [29252/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that the number of staff in my Department by County is as follows :

Dublin - 263.8

Tullamore, Co. Offaly - 31.5

With regard to State agencies under the aegis of my department, see below:

Body	#	#	Number of Staff employed by county
Cand AG’s			156, Dublin
Central Bank			1,597 (FTE) as at end April 2017, Dublin
Credit Reviewer			1, Dublin
Credit Union Advisory Committee			Nil
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)			2, Dublin

Questions - Written Answers

Body	#	#	Number of Staff employed by county
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal			Nil
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau			38.2 (FTE), Dublin
Financial Services Ombudsman Council			Nil
Investor Compensation Company			7.5, Dublin
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation			4, Dublin
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal			1 part-time contracted employee (the Registrar), Dublin
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council			5*, Dublin *(1 staff member is on secondment from the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform to IFAC)
National Asset Management Agency			287, Dublin
National Treasury Management Agency			474*, Dublin * The National Treasury Management Agency assigns staff to the National Asset Management Agency and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland. Total number of staff in the 3 agencies (NTMA, NAMA & SBCI) is 777.** Figure correct as at 30/04/2017
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	County	FTE	Headcount
	Carlow	3	3
	Clare	257.1	284
	Cork	390.6	413
	Donegal	101.8	107
	Dublin	2,656.80	2,816
	Galway	222	234
	Kerry	129.3	142
	Kildare	54.5	57

Body	#	#	Number of Staff employed by county
	Kilkenny	123.6	129
	Laois	12.4	13
	Limerick	836.4	881
	Louth	216.7	226
	Mayo	113.7	123
	Meath	86.2	93
	Monaghan	39.8	41
	Offaly	11.1	13
	Roscommon	14	14
	Sligo	69.7	74
	Tipperary	323.8	360
	Waterford	121.5	130
	Westmeath	77.1	80
	Wexford	124.7	132
	Wicklow	5.8	6
	Total	5,991.80	6,371
Social Finance Foundation			3.5 (FTE), Dublin
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland			16, Dublin
Tax Appeals Commissioners			10, Dublin

Departmental Banking

348. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of the sanctions his Department gave in order to open public bank accounts in the name of An Garda Síochána in each of the years 1997 to 2011; the locations of the accounts that were opened; the purpose of the accounts that were opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28659/17]

349. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public bank accounts sanctioned for opening by An Garda Síochána prior to the commencement of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 by his Department in each of the years 1990 to 13 July 2006; the locations and purposes for the accounts that were given approval to be opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28700/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 348 and 349 together.

It will be necessary for Government Departments and Offices to open bank accounts with the commercial banks from time to time to facilitate payments made or receipts received arising from the performance of their statutory roles and responsibilities. These accounts are deemed to be public bank accounts within the meaning of Section 18 of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act, 1866, since they will contain public moneys, either as a result of voted moneys being deposited in them in order to make payments, or receipts being lodged for transfer to the

Central Fund. The opening of a public bank account required the prior written sanction of the Minister for Finance up to establishment of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in July 2011.

The schedule attached to this reply sets out the details of public bank accounts opened in the name of An Garda Síochána and sanctioned by the Minister for Finance during the period 1992 to 2011. The schedule is split into those public bank accounts sanctioned prior to the Garda Síochána Act 2005 (Commencement) (No.2) Order 2006, i.e. 14th July 2006, and those public bank accounts sanctioned after this commencement date.

My Department is consulting with the National Archives regarding files currently held in storage off-site containing records regarding the details of public bank accounts sanctioned by the Minister for Finance for the years 1990 to 1992. The information will be provided to the Deputy directly once it becomes available.

Public Bank Accounts for An Garda Síochána Sanctioned 14th July 2006 - 31st December 2011

Title and Location	Function/Purpose	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
Forfeiture Account	Forfeited and unclaimed monies to the State	2011	Finance Section, Garda HQ
BUNCRANA	District Imprest Account	2010	Finance Section, Garda HQ
EU Central Fund Public Bank Account Term Deposit Account	Receipt of Payments from EU for Garda Projects	2010	Finance Section, Garda HQ
EU Central Fund Public Bank Access 30 Deposit Account	Receipt of Payments from EU for Garda Projects	2010	Finance Section, Garda HQ
EU Central Garda Fund Public Bank Account Notice Deposit Account	Receipt of Payments from EU for Garda Projects	2010	Finance Section, Garda HQ
GFCPO, Thurles	Collection of Fines for the Fixed Charge Processing Office	2009	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Minister for Social and Family Affairs Vote Receipts	Receipts from Pobal for a Traveller Inter-agency Project	2009	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Garda District Boundary Realignment - 3 Bank Accounts	District Imprest Accounts: Leixlip District Ardee District Laytown District	2008	Finance Section, Garda HQ
EULEX Mission - Kosovo	Imprest Account	2008	Finance Section, Garda HQ

Public Bank Accounts for An Garda Síochána Sanctioned 1992 to 13th July 2006

Title and Location	Function/Purpose	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
Garda Fixed Penalty Office, Fines on the Spot	Collection of Fines	2006	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Garda Fixed Penalty Office, Fixed Charge Penalty System	Collection of Fines	2006	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Garda Central Vetting Unit	Vetting Charges	2006	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Community Relations Grants	Receipt of Community Relations Grants	2005	Finance Section, Garda HQ
Welfare Payments Garda Payroll	Disability and maternity benefit payments	2005	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda Paypath	Garda Paypath	2005	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
OCSE Mission	Imprest Account	2002	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda Síochána Special Services (Operations)	Imprest Account	2001	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda Síochána G District	Imprest Account	2001	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda National Immigration Bureau	Imprest Account	2000	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Terenure P Garda District	Imprest Account.	1999	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
EU Central Garda Fund	Central bank account for all EU funded projects	1999	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Falcone Programme 119, Public Bank Account	Project in halting the theft and trade in illegally obtained microchips.	1999	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Questions - Written Answers

Title and Location	Function/Purpose	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
Falcone Programme 121, Public Bank Account	Project on a multidisciplinary approach between Ireland and the UK to combat organised crime	1999	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Oisín Conference Programme, Public Bank Account	Conference on “An International Response to Improvised Terrorist Weaponry”	1998	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation - Oisín Programme, Public Bank Account	Training exchange programme for personnel involved in investigation of money laundering and seizure of assets	1998	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Ashbourne Garda District, Public Bank Account	Imprest Account	1998	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
EU Projects Special Intervention Units Public Bank Account	Training exchange programme for operational managers of Special Intervention Units	1998	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Oisín Drugs Police Exchange Programme Public Bank Account	Exchange programme	1998	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
N.W.R.C.S. (Oisín) Exchange Programme Public Bank Account	Exchange programme	1998	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
European Union Projects No. 1 Public Bank Account	Training Exchange Programme for Operational Managers concerned with Drug Trafficking	1997	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
European Union Projects No. 2 Public Bank Account	Training Exchange Programme for Operational Managers of Urban Drug Units	1997	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Lucan Garda District Public Bank Account	Imprest Bank Account	1997	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Title and Location	Function/Purpose	Year of Sanction	Sanction Request From
Department of Justice - Traffic Department, Dublin Castle, Public Bank Account	Imprest Account	1997	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda Community Relations, Public Bank Account	Imprest Account	1996	Garda Division, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Garda College Public Bank Account	Sanction for continued operation of Garda College Templemore public bank account for a training programme.	1996	Garda Division, Department of Justice
National Drugs Unit, Public Bank Account	Bank account for National Drugs Unit under operational control of a Deputy Commissioner	1995	Garda Division, Department of Justice
National Bureau of Fraud Investigation, Public Bank Account	Bank account for the operation of the National Bureau of Fraud Investigation	1995	Garda Division, Department of Justice
Superintendent, Garda Siochana, Roxboro Road	Imprest Account	1992	Department of Justice

A public bank account was sanctioned in the period 1992 to 2011, the details of which have not been included above for Garda security reasons.

Teachers' Remuneration

350. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of restoring entry level pay scales to pre-FEMPI levels, for example, equal pay for newly qualified teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28983/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 10% reductions in starting pay for certain new entrants were introduced in January 2011 as part of the National Recovery Plan in order to reduce the Public Service Pay Bill by the then Government.

The issue of addressing the difference in incremental salary scales between those public servants, who entered public service employment since 2011 and those who entered before that date was addressed with the relevant union interests under the provisions of the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). From 1 November 2013 pre and post-2011 pay scales were merged into a single consolidated scale applicable to each grade. Generally, the third point of 1 November 2013 payscale is equivalent to the first point of the pre 2011 scale. Guidelines in relation to the merging of the scales are available on my Departments website <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/haddington-road-agreement/>.

In addition, the Lansdowne Road Agreement has provided the flexibility to address particular sectoral issues such as the restoration of supervision and substitution payments and new entrant payments in the Education Sector and the restoration of rent allowances to new entrant firefighters and members of An Garda Síochána.

Indicative estimates of the total cost of moving all staff hired on new entrant scales up two increment points would be over €209m excluding any cost in respect of retrospective payment.

Following consideration of the Public Service Pay Commission's published report by the Government, public service unions and staff representative associations were invited to engage with public service employers led by officials of my Department, on the negotiation and agreement of an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. These discussions commenced on the 22 May and concluded on the 8th June last. The outcome to these discussions, facilitated by the Workplace Relations Commission, is available on the DPER website <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/minister-donohoe-welcomes-proposals-issued-by-wrc-on-extension-to-the-lansdowne-road-agreement/>.

The terms of the proposals, commended to both parties by the Workplace Relations Commission, includes a reference to the new entrant issue at Paragraph 4. This provision acknowledges issues of concern on this matter and provides for an examination of the remaining salary scale issues to be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the proposed Agreement.

Departmental Staff Data

351. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form [29030/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the tables below outline the number of staff employed by my Department by county.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

County	Number of staff
Dublin	398
Offaly	5
Total	403

Office of Government Procurement

County	Number of staff
Dublin	149
Cork	12
Limerick	7
Meath	17
Sligo	10
Total	195

National Shared Services Office

County	Number of staff
Dublin	368
Clare	4
Galway	70
Offaly	93
Kerry	137
Total	672

In addition, the tables below outline the number of staff employed by bodies under the aegis of my Department by county.

Institute of Public Administration

County	Number of staff
Dublin	86
Total	86

Public Appointments Service

County	Number of staff
Dublin	166
Total	166

Office of the Ombudsman

County	Number of staff
Dublin	114.3
Total	114.3

State Laboratory

County	Number of staff
Kildare	92.8
Total	92.8

Special EU Programmes Body

County	Number of staff
Antrim	38
Monaghan	9
Tyrone	15
Total	62

Office of Public Works

County	State Industrial	Established	Total
Carlow	4	0	4
Cavan	0	0	0
Clare	7	0	7
Cork	71	10	81
Donegal	33	2	35
Dublin	543	201	744
Galway	147	27	174

County	State Industrial	Established	Total
Kerry	86	5	91
Kildare	29	0	29
Kilkenny	87	44	131
Laois	11	2	13
Leitrim	11	2	13
Limerick	57	17	74
Longford	4	0	4
Louth	17	1	18
Mayo	42	37	79
Meath	157	308	465
Monaghan	1	0	1
Offaly	17	0	17
Roscommon	1	1	2
Sligo	19	6	25
Tipperary	69	3	72
Waterford	8	6	14
Westmeath	32	6	38
Wexford	43	1	44
Wicklow	21	2	23
Total	1,517	681	2,198

Civil Service Staff Data

352. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the costs of all the Civil Service pension schemes which cover personnel in established and established Civil Service and State industrial posts that are not members of the single public service pension scheme. [26527/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I take it that the Deputy is referring to the cost of the pension schemes for established and non-established civil servants, including State industrial posts.

The gross provisional outturn figures for expenditure on civil service pension schemes (excluding the Single Public Service Pension Scheme) for established and non-established personnel made from Vote 12 Superannuation and Retired Allowances are summarised in the table below:

Scheme	2016 Provisional Outturn €000
Pension schemes for established civil servants, and for spouses and children of established civil servants, members of the judiciary and court officers	477,467
Pension schemes for non-established civil servants, and for spouses and children of non-established civil servants	21,243

Public Sector Staff Retirements

353. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to extend the retirement age beyond 65 years of age for local authority employees who entered employment prior to 1 April 2004 to bring them in line with those that entered the public service on or after 1 January 2004 that are not obliged to retire on age grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26591/17]

355. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of progress on work on the abolition of the mandatory retirement age in the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26686/17]

363. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to change the mandatory retirement age in the public sector, in view of the fact that many persons wish to continue working beyond the age of 65; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26990/17]

364. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding public sector retirement; the status of legislation in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27027/17]

380. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on progress implementing the recommendation in the interdepartmental report on fuller working lives to review the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the State pension (contributory); the nature and scope of contact with public sector employers regarding the implementation of this recommendation; the public sector employers with which his Department has been in contact on this matter; when he expects the review to be concluded; when the review will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27424/17]

385. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when forced retirement at 65 years of age for employees in the public sector will be reviewed and extended to an older age; the timeframe for this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27794/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 353, 355, 363, 364, 380 and 385 together.

On foot of one of the recommendations of the Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked to review the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension.

In the context of the review, which is currently underway, meetings were held with employers from all public service sectors, including the civil service, local authority and health sectors, supplemented by further interactions and discussions with the employers.

The review is expected to be completed by the end of the current quarter.

Future policy in this area will be considered by Government following the outcome of the review, at which time the report of the review will be published.

Any change in the compulsory retirement age for public servants will require primary legislation.

Question Heading for question(s) 354

354. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of planned works to develop a new Greystones coastguard station; the barriers which have been identified to completion of works to the station; the estimated cost of completion of works; the estimated completion date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26643/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) and the Irish Coastguard Service (IRCG) are responsible for the financing of Coast Guard Station Projects. The Office of Public Works (OPW) provides advice on the design of such projects and manages their delivery in line with the requirements of the two bodies concerned. The current position is that the Department, the IRCG and the OPW are reviewing the scope of a project for Greystones that will meet their requirements at that location within their overall budgetary parameters. The potential timeframe for the completion of any works involved should become clearer, once this review has been completed.

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the potential cost of building a facility in Greystones in advance of the procurement process for the construction works involved.

Question No. 355 answered with Question No. 353.

Capital Expenditure Programme

356. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an amount has been factored into net fiscal space projections for 2018 to 2021 regarding the €2.6 billion of additional capital resources to be allocated over the period 2018 to 2021 under the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26847/17]

357. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total Exchequer funding allocated to the capital plan 2018 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26848/17]

358. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the date on which he will provide details on the allocation of the €2.6 billion currently unallocated under the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26849/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 356 to 358, inclusive, together.

The €2.6 billion of additional capital resources to be allocated over the period 2018 to 2021 arising from the ongoing review of the Capital Plan are included in the most recent forecasts of net fiscal space published by the Department of Finance at Budget-time last October. My Department understands that revised estimates of net fiscal space are currently being prepared by the Department of Finance for publication in the forthcoming Summer Economic Statement.

Departmental Contracts

359. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by

his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26877/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the following table outlines the payments made by my Department to the company referenced in the question since March 2011.

Year	Purpose of Contract	Amount
2011	Development of the Public Service Reform Plan 2011	€80,465
2012	Capacity and Capability Review of the Central Procurement Function	€30,750
2013	PeoplePoint Project	€2,245,165
2014	Procurement Benefits Measurement Guidance	€29,582
2014	PeoplePoint Project	€1,141,297
2015	Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis Report	€98,400
2015	ICT & Telephony Procurement Support	€188,190
2015	PeoplePoint Project	€148,701
2015	PeoplePoint Operations	€31,144
2016	Civil Service HR Strategy Assessment Workshop	€6,150
2016	Financial Management Shared Services Project	€7,201,215
2017	Financial Management Shared Services Project	€641,136
Total		€11,842,195

None of the bodies under the aegis of my Department engaged the services of the relevant company.

Flood Prevention Measures

360. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the actions which have been taken to date to prevent future flooding episodes in the mid-Shannon region. [26893/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is delivering a multi-annual programme of capital investment in flood defence measures, with €430 million provided for in the Capital Investment Plan 2016 to 2021. Since 2009, a number of major flood defence schemes have been completed in the Shannon catchment area including Ennis Upper and Derrymullen, Ballinasloe. Further schemes are currently underway at Kings Island in Limerick, Foynes, Ennis Lower and Ennis South.

The OPW and Westmeath County Council are working together to advance proposals to deal with the flooding issues in Athlone. OPW has agreed to fund the costs of flood relief works for the town and the Council has appointed consultants to develop and bring forward proposals

for several areas of the town which are affected by flooding. The Council hope to progress some of the works in the areas of the Quay, Iona Villas and Golden Island through the Part 8 planning process shortly with possible commencement of construction before the end of the year and to progress the other elements of the works through a Part 10 planning process later in the year with construction in 2018.

The Council also carried out some advance remedial works in the town towards the end of 2016 in the Canal Walk and Griffith Street areas with funding being provided by OPW.

The OPW introduced the Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme in 2009, following the flood events experienced in many parts of the country. The purpose of the scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. The scheme generally applies where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame.

The attached Table 1 sets out the number of projects approved each year since 2009 for each Local Authority for whom part of their administrative area lies within the Shannon Catchment area.

The core strategy for addressing the significant flood risks along the River Shannon is the OPW's Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. Of the 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) nationwide, there are 66 in the Shannon River Basin District that have been assessed within the Shannon CFRAM study. These are listed in Table 2 attached.

Feasible flood relief structural measures have been identified to provide protection to almost all properties at assessed significant risk from flooding in these AFAs. Following a public consultation process, the Flood Risk Management Plans are now being finalised, taking on board the observations received.

In January 2016, the Government took decisive action to support the existing plans in place to address flooding on the Shannon and established the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group to enhance ongoing co-operation of all State agencies involved with the River Shannon and to add value to the CFRAM Programme.

The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group has taken the decision to develop a plan for strategic maintenance works on the River Shannon that will complement the Group's Work Programme and the specific measures that are identified for the areas at risk in the CFRAM Draft Shannon Flood Risk Management Plan. The Group has established a sub-committee to address all of the necessary legal, environmental, technical and other considerations that arise in bringing forward both short term and long term proposals that can benefit flood risk management.

The Group has now agreed to the delivery of targeted maintenance activities to be carried out in a range of locations this year in accordance with the permitted seasonal windows for such activities.

The Group has also endorsed the commencement of a specific project to identify viable flood risk reduction measures in the Shannon Callows. Building on initial assessments undertaken as part of the Shannon CFRAM study, the OPW are leading on the project, in conjunction with Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The project is to include more detailed assessment of the possible removal of identified constrictions or "pinch points" upstream of Meelick Weir.

Table 1**Approved Projects under Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme in the Shannon Catchment 2009 to 2017 (to end April)**

Local Authority	Approved Projects 2009-2017									
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	End-April 2017	Total
Cavan County Council	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Clare County Council	1	6	4	5	0	0	6	1	0	23
Cork County Council	2	9	5	5	1	0	1	2	0	25
Donegal County Council	0	10	2	2	6	5	0	0	0	25
Galway County Council	1	66	18	24	7	7	19	14	9	165
Kerry County Council	8	2	4	4	1	1	5	2	0	27
Laois County Council	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Leitrim County Council	0	4	2	5	3	3	0	2	0	19
Limerick City & County Council	0	17	2	0	2	1	2	3	0	27
Longford County Council	0	3	5	0	0	0	1	5	2	16
Mayo County Council	8	5	4	1	0	2	1	6	1	28
Meath Council	1	1	1	3	0	0	1	2	0	9
Offaly County Council	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Roscommon County Council	5	14	6	2	1	1	0	10	4	43

Questions - Written Answers

Local Authority	Approved Projects 2009-2017									
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	End-April 2017	Total
Sligo County Council	1	1	1	1			1	0	0	5
Tipperary County Council	2	15	5	7	0	1	4	7	4	45
Westmeath County Council	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Totals	32	162	59	61	21	21	41	56	20	473

Further details on all projects approved under the Scheme can be found on the OPW website: <http://www.opw.ie/en/flood-risk-management/operations/minorfloodworkscoastalprotectionscheme/>

Table 2

Areas of Further Assessment (AFAs) in the Shannon CFRAM Study

Co Kerry	Tralee	Banna	Moneycashen	Tarbert Power Station
	Listowel	Abbeydorney	Ballylongford	
Co Cork	Charleville	Milford		
Co Limerick	Athea	Limerick City	Castleconnell	Dromcolliher
	Adare	Clarina	Croom	Kilmallock
	Rathkeale	Askeaton	Newcastle West	Cappamore
	Abbeyfeale	Foynes		
Co Clare	Kilkee	Kilrush	Springfield	Killaloe/Ballina
	Quin	Bunratty	Sixmilebridge	Shannon
	Ennis	Shannon Airport (IRR3)	O'Briens Bridge	
Co Tipperary	Roscrea	Borrisokane	Nenagh	Newport
Co Galway	Portumna	Ahascragh	Ballinalsoe	
Co Offaly	Clara	Pollagh	Rahan	Birr
	Shannon Harbour	Shannon BridgePower Station(IRR2)		
Co Laois	Clonaslee			
Co Longford	Longford	Clondara	Edgeworthstown	Abbeysrule
	Lanesborough Power Station (IRR1)	Ballymahon		
Co Roscommon	Boyle	Roscommon	Castlerea	Athleague
Co Westmeath	Athlone	Mullingar	Kilbeggan	
Co Leitrim	Drumshanbo	Leitrim	Mohill	Dromod
	Carrick-on-Shannon			

Brexit Negotiations

361. Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26908/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On 2 May 2017 the Government published a position paper setting out its comprehensive approach to the Brexit negotiations. The paper includes an analysis of the economic and sectoral implications of Brexit for Ireland, and sets out the Government's strategy for responding to this challenge. Detailed and intensive work on this is continuing across Government.

Now that the EU has agreed its negotiating position, the Government will intensify its focus on the economic implications of Brexit and will produce a further paper on this issue.

Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage.

A key issue for which my Department has responsibility is Ireland's Cooperation Programmes with the UK that are co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund, including the North South PEACE and INTERREG Programmes. As part of the contingency planning undertaken by the Government prior to the UK referendum, my Department identified the risks to these EU-funded programmes in the event that the UK voted to leave.

Following the result of the referendum, my short-term objective was to secure the programmes and give programme beneficiaries the confidence they need to proceed with projects. This was achieved last October when, along with the Northern Ireland Finance Minister, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, I was able to announce that we had agreed a safeguard clause that would Brexit-proof letters of offer to programme beneficiaries.

Now that this has been achieved, the medium term objective is to see these programmes successfully implemented out to 2020, through a period during which the UK is expected to leave the EU. The safeguard clause should ensure that this can happen. My long term objective is to have successor programmes post-2020. Work is already underway to secure this objective. I raised the matter at the recent Cohesion Policy meeting of the EU's General Affairs Council in Luxembourg where I also discussed it bilaterally with the Regional Policy Commissioner, Corina Creţu.

Public Sector Pensions Data

362. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26977/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the following tables outline the total pension contributions and pension levy made by Public Sector workers, excluding Civil Servants, in each body under the aegis of my Department:

Pension Contributions

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform(Office of Government Procurement) €	Office of Public Works €	Special EU Programmes Body €	Institute of Public Administration €
2010	-	232,000	4,389	117,561
2011	-	228,000	4,045	115,903
2012	-	225,000	4,941	124,793
2013	-	212,000	5,355	114,428
2014	948	253,000	5,530	99,650
2015	5,580	274,000	16,512	97,244
2016	6,247	316,000	17,897	99,545
2017 (YTD)	2,691	127,000	7,584	45,970
Total	15,466	1,867,000	66,253	815,094

Pension Levy

Year	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform(Office of Government Procurement) €	Office of Public Works €	Special EU Programmes Body €	Institute of Public Administration €
2010	-	2,694,000	17,524	381,503
2011	-	2,637,000	13,951	388,384
2012	-	2,589,000	17,350	371,518
2013	-	2,553,000	19,317	354,970
2014	3,737	2,334,000	20,277	312,145
2015	7,770	2,186,000	20,575	287,679
2016	6,422	1,453,000	12,069	255,911
2017 (YTD)	2,773	481,000	4,631	101,786
Total	20,702	16,927,000	125,694	2,453,896

Questions Nos. 363 and 364 answered with Question No. 353.

Flood Relief Schemes

365. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to an ongoing problem of flooding in a location (details supplied) in County Cork following flood relief measures being put in place; if the resolution of this problem will be pursued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27029/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that Cork County Council is investigating the problem at this location in the first instance as the flooding may be due to a collapsed drainage culvert in the vicinity of this location rather than any connection to the flood relief scheme. The problem will be addressed appropriately by the

relevant body when the exact cause of the problem is identified.

Public Sector Staff Recruitment

366. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether the standardised test of high-speed verbal and numerical reasoning administered as part of the civil service recruitment process discriminates against persons with mental health or neurological conditions which impinge on their ability to complete such high-speed tests that are otherwise highly qualified for recruitment. [27047/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is an independent, statutory body which provides professional recruitment and selection services to the civil service.

I understand from PAS that they use verbal and numerical reasoning tests, alongside other assessment tools, for Civil Service roles such as Clerical Officer, Executive Officer, Third Secretary and Administrative Officer. The reason for using these types of test is that there is a very significant body of international research which provides evidence that they are the most effective techniques to predict job performance.

There are a wide range of mental health or neurological conditions and they all impact on individuals in different ways. A number of neurological conditions are on a spectrum. Therefore, the condition will affect different people in different ways.

The PAS offers reasonable accommodations for people who have a disability. There is a Charter of Positive Supports for Candidates with Disabilities which is available on www.publicjobs.ie. One of the Principles in the Charter is:

1. "PAS will positively support candidates with disabilities in requesting reasonable accommodations and will assess all such requests through a transparent, good-practice process which is consistently applied."

Through a process of allocating reasonable accommodations, the PAS engages with individual applicants to identify the most suitable accommodations for their particular condition.

Disability Act Employment Targets

367. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefore; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27142/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department is an equal opportunities employer and all recruitment campaigns are conducted in strict compliance with the Codes of Practice set out by the Commission for Public Service Appointments. Codes include the Code of Practice governing the External and Internal Appointments of Persons with Disabilities to Positions in the Irish Civil Service and Certain Public Bodies, which is available at www.cpsa.ie.

Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies:

- to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities;
- to comply with any statutory Code of Practice;
- to meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities; and
- to report every year on achievement of these obligations.

As the Deputy will be aware, the National Disability Authority reports on compliance with this 3% target. The following table outlines the latest percentages of staff with disabilities that work in my Department and the bodies under its aegis:

Department/Office	Percentage of staff with disabilities
Public Expenditure and Reform	5.1%
State Laboratory	5.43%
Ombudsman	3.23%
Public Appointments Service	3.21%
Office of Public Works	3.7%

Even though the Institute of Public Administration has an equal opportunities policy, the 3% quota is not being exceeded at the moment. There has not been an advertised competition in relation to the quota as all positions in the Institute are open to suitably qualified applicants irrespective of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, religion or membership of the traveller community.

As the Special EU Programmes Body is a North South Body, the quota of 3% does not apply. Whilst the Body does not work towards a quota regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, 3.16% of the SEUPB's workforce are regarded as employees with a disability. The Body has not had any specific advertised competitions in relations to the 3% quota.

There is an obligation in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) for a dedicated competition for people with disabilities to be met in the future and to increase the quota from 3% to 6%. This is being considered by a cross-party group chaired by Mr Fergus Finlay and my Department is a member of the Group.

Currently, recruitment to the Civil and Public Service is based on the merit principle. Although organisations can conduct their own recruitment, the Public Appointments Service (PAS) carries out much of the recruitment for the Civil Service and also recruits for some parts of the wider Public Service. There are no campaigns advertised at present which are confined to people with a disability. The approach of PAS to recruitment is to seek to ensure that, in every aspect of their engagement with candidates, each individual candidate is enabled to perform to the best of their ability across the entire range of recruitment campaigns run by PAS. In keeping with this core value, PAS provides a range of accommodations for people with disabilities in the recruitment and assessment processes for all public service campaigns for which they recruit. PAS also conducts equality-proofing all of the new assessment and selection techniques used as part of those recruitment campaigns.

National Training Fund

368. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has undertaken an analysis of whether it would be more efficient in terms of reduc-

ing uncertainty and transaction costs on employers to implement the increase in the national training levy proposed as part of the employer contribution mechanism in one budget rather than sequenced over several budgets as proposed. [27200/17]

369. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether or not it would be possible to vary the rate employers pay on the national training levy to the proposed employer contribution mechanism according to the assumed benefit they derive from higher education training or alternatively to varying contributions by sector whereby employers in more high skilled sectors pay a higher contribution. [27201/17]

370. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the limits imposed by the expenditure rule on spending the surplus of the national training fund are due to the legislative provisions which established the fund as a hypothecated revenue rather than as general revenue and as such could be altered by amending the National Training Fund Act 2000 to disestablish the fund as a hypothecated revenue and re-establish it as general revenue. [27203/17]

374. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has sought approval from EUROSTA on whether it would be permissible under the fiscal rules to use the surplus from the national training fund levy for capital expenditure. [27324/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 368 to 370, inclusive, and 374 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, I announced at Budget time last October my intention, together with the Minister for Education and Skills, to carry out a consultation process on the design and operation of an Exchequer-Employment mechanism to help fund higher and further education and training into the future and to drive continued reform. The consultation process specifically aimed to:

- Fully explore with employers the balance between *impacts* (on competitiveness and productivity), *benefits* (of skilled human capital) and *costs* of a proposed investment mechanism;
- Contribute to the development of an equitable and sustainable long term funding model for HE and FET;
- Strengthen outcomes for the HE and FET system of benefit to employer and the wider economy;
- Convey a clear signal domestically and internationally of the value Ireland places on the education and training of our human capital in an ever more competitive and risk heavy environment; and
- Demonstrate collective leadership where Government and Employers can consult on a high level national priority and together drive enhanced outcomes in return for additional investment.

There was considerable engagement (28 submissions) with the public consultation, which was subsequently followed by an open forum event with stakeholders on May 31st hosted by the Minister for Education and Skills and I. The purpose of the forum was firstly to better understand are the proceeds from the National Training Fund (NTF) currently being put to the best use and secondly, if there was an increase in the NTF levy how should this be configured in order to meet the needs of employers and the wider economy. Both Departments are now actively considering all of the issues raised as part of the consultation process including the spe-

cific issues referred to in the Deputy's questions, for example, the sequencing of the proposed increase in the NTF and the scope and case for establishing differential rates for the NTF levy. Following this consideration, the Minister for Education and Skills and I will bring a Memorandum to Government on the outcome of the consultation process and the proposed next steps.

With respect to the use of the surplus in the NTF; as set out in the consultation document this is constrained due to the EU fiscal rules. In the absence of an increased rate of contribution, additional expenditure cannot be sourced from the NTF without a corresponding reduction in Exchequer expenditure in other areas. The rules are designed to ensure that increases in public expenditure are sustainably financed and reduce the risk that additional expenditure is funded on the basis of cyclical or windfall revenues. The fiscal rules are applicable to all government finances therefore to disestablish the fund and re-establish the proceeds as general government revenue, as the Deputy suggested, would not alter its treatment.

As set out in the legislation the intent is for the proceeds of the NTF to be used to give skills to, or raise skills amongst those in, or seeking, employment. Given how the surplus safeguarded the FET sector during the downturn, the implications and knock-on effects of using the fund for any other purpose, including capital expenditure, require careful consideration. Regarding capital expenditure more generally, the Deputy will be aware that the capital plan is currently being reviewed by my Department in order to take stock of our national infrastructure priorities now and in the future and to allocate further resources so that they best meet our social and economic needs.

Office of Public Works Staff

371. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe for the appointment of a safety officer of national monuments which was advertised and interviewed for earlier in 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27259/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): An internal recruitment competition for the position of Foreperson, Grade 1 (Safety Officer) in the National Monuments Service of the Office of Public Works (OPW), was held in late 2016 and the panel formed thereafter will remain in place for a period of two years.

In tandem, the OPW has also been engaged in the last several months in a gradual programme to progressively replace some of the gaps in staffing which have occurred over the last several years with a view to restoring the capacity of the organisation to respond at the key operational levels. The restored organisation will have a strong focus on a number of key priorities, including the delivery of necessary works projects and Health & Safety practice and management in particular.

The OPW will continue therefore in the context of developing the renewed organisation to give full consideration to appointing necessary H&S supports to operational needs and priorities. However no definite plans have been made in this regard as yet until a full assessment of needs and available resources has been made.

Public Sector Pensions

372. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if retired public servants will be represented at the pay talks by associations representing speci-

cally retired public servants; if an organisation (details supplied) are or will be participants in the talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27275/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): When inviting the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions last month to the public service pay talks, which have now concluded, I indicated that a separate process of consultation would take place with an association representing public service pensioners. That process is ongoing, and my officials met recently with representatives of the Alliance of Retired Public Servants, who articulated the concerns and interests of public service pensioners in relation to the impact of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) legislation on pensions in payment through the operation of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) and related matters. A further meeting is planned.

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

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

Public Sector Pensions

373. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans regarding retaining the link between occupational pensions received by public service pensioners and the wages or salary of the person's grade at retirement. [27292/17]

378. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to restore pro rata pension increases for retired public sector workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27394/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 and 378 together.

In the past, the occupational pensions of public service pensioners were generally adjusted in line with changes in the wages or salary of the pensioner's grade at retirement. Sometimes referred to as "pay parity", this non-statutory linkage lapsed in 2010, when the values of pensions in payment were left unchanged notwithstanding salary cuts at the beginning of that year which affected all public servants under the financial emergency legislation.

Due to a grace period associated with the 2010 salary cuts, public servants, who retired in the 26 months following those cuts, i.e. in the period to end-February 2012, had their pensions based on the higher pre-cut salary levels. This has led to the current situation whereby post February-2012 retirees, on a like-for-like basis, mostly receive lower pensions than their earlier-retired counterparts.

In addition, since the beginning of 2011 a progressively-structured "Public Service Pension Reduction" (PSPR) has decreased the values of public service pensions above specified thresholds. A significant part-reversal or unwinding of PSPR is under way as set out in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015.

The lapsing of pay parity along with the pension differential arising between pre and post-2012 retirees, have created the conditions under which, as we move beyond “FEMPI” legislation and the progressive removal of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) towards more normal pay and pension setting conditions in the public service, the issue of how to adjust the post-award value of public service pensions, through appropriate pay or other linkages has required consideration.

In this context, Section 6.2 of the proposed Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, which was published last week, indicates that, over the duration of that agreement if ratified, policy on public service pensions in payment will be guided by the following three elements:

First, the need to adopt an equitable approach to the various public service pensioner cohorts differentiated by date of retirement (in particular pre and post end-February 2012) is affirmed.

Second, for those who retired or will retire post end-February 2012, to the extent that they retired on reduced salaries for pension award purposes, they will receive pension increases in line with pay increases received by their peers currently in employment in accordance with the terms of the collective agreement.

Third, when alignment is achieved between pre and post end-February 2012 pensioners, as will happen progressively for salary ranges up to €70,000 in 2020 under the proposed collective agreement, pay increases will continue to benefit pensions in payment for the duration of the agreement.

Question No. 374 answered with Question No. 368.

Tribunals of Inquiry

375. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all the persons that have been hired by the Garda Commissioner to form part of the Charleton liaison committee were sanctioned by his Department and were employed following a full public procurement process; and if so, the details of same. [27344/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department provided sanction for additional resources to support the work of the Disclosures Tribunal in early May of this year. This was in response to a recommendation from the Department of Justice and Equality which outlined the need for extra resources to support the timely completion of the work of the Tribunal and also to minimise any potential negative impacts on delivery of the Garda Modernisation and Renewal Programme. The Department of Justice advised my Department that it fully considered the request from An Garda Síochána and was satisfied that it was an appropriate approach.

The sanction related to a small number of individuals (i.e. two retired members of An Garda Síochána and one civilian). In the event, my understanding is that the civilian was not re-hired. The Deputy should note that the specific process undertaken to rehire the two former members is a matter for the Garda Commissioner.

It is also worth noting that sanction was provided to engage a solicitor subject to compliance with all relevant procurement guidelines.

Public Private Partnerships Data

376. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to parliamentary Question No. 215 of 6 April 2017, the reason his Department does not publish details of the projected annual cost of individual PPP projects over their lifetime. [27366/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department's primary role in relation to PPPs is to facilitate the PPP process centrally by developing the general policy framework (including, where necessary, the legal framework) and the capital investment policy framework within which PPPs operate and by providing central guidance to Departments and other State Authorities in that context.

Financial responsibility for individual PPP and concession projects rests with the relevant Sponsoring Department or agency.

My Department publishes a full suite of guidance to facilitate the PPP process, which is available on the Central PPP Unit's website at www.ppp.gov.ie. The website also contains details in respect of each individual PPP and Concession project, collected by my Department from the relevant Sponsoring Department or agency, on the contractual capital value, cost of unitary payments paid to date, future contractual commitments and year in which the final payment is due to be paid, for each such project.

The Deputy will appreciate that collation of this detailed financial information, from a variety of different sponsoring Departments/agencies, in respect of 25 different projects, each with payment obligations over a remaining contract life ranging from 6 years to 35 years, is a complex reporting task. Clearly, it is also important to ensure that the information collated and published on the website is accurate and consistent with other existing reporting arrangements the Sponsoring Departments/agencies have with, for example, the Central Statistics Office and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to the same projects. To date, it has been considered that the details published on the website in respect of each individual PPP and concession project, as I have outlined above, are comprehensive and provide transparency on the cost of each project over its lifetime. Providing an additional breakdown of the future contractual commitments in each case, which extend to up to 35 years, would represent an important change in the reporting responsibilities of my Department and would run the risk, for example, of impacting adversely on the timeliness of existing reporting.

However, in light of the Deputy's question I have asked my Department to consider the scope for providing further details in relation to the breakdown of projected future unitary payment commitments by project on an annual basis in future years, in consultation with the Central Statistics Office and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, having regard to their plans for the publication by them of financial details in relation to the projects in question in their annual publications.

Public Sector Staff

377. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has advised Government Departments that applications by civil servants to continue working past 65 years of age under circular 13/1975 are no longer to be accepted; if so, the date on which; the reason this decision was made; the number of applications made under circular 13/1975 for each of the years between 2010 and to date in 2017; the number of applications that were accepted; and the income figures used to calculate the hardship threshold set out in part 3 of the circular. [27384/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Dep-

uty will be aware, the extension of service beyond retirement age for civil servants, in certain limited circumstances, is provided for under Circular 13/1975.

The Circular notes that under Section 8.4 (1) of the Civil Service Regulation Act 1956, 65 years is the retiring age for certain Civil Servants. Provision is also made for circumstances in which an officer may be retained beyond his/her retirement age under conditions prescribed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

These conditions have been varied from time to time and the conditions were consolidated in Circular 13/1975, and have been updated from time to time in respect of the financial amounts.

The 1975 Circular provides that

“An officer may be retired beyond the age of 65 years only:

- for the purpose of creating his/her pension (Increasing their pension by getting an extra increment (maximum 3 months),

- on grounds of public interest (e.g. special difficulty in replacing a person with unusual qualifications; need to allow time to finish a particularly important piece of work which cannot otherwise be done without serious inconvenience).

- on grounds of hardship (The hardship ground is deemed to exist where an officer, if retired, would have an income from all sources not exceeding the contributory old age social welfare benefit or if his income would not exceed 25% of his total annual remuneration on the date of normal retirement).

- on grounds of national service

The current rates used for determining cases on grounds of hardship are as follows;

State Pension (Non-Contributory) from 10 March 2017

State Pension (Non-Contributory)	Rate per week (maximum)
Personal rate, aged 66 and under 80	€227.00
Increase for a qualified adult aged under 66	€150.00
Increase for a qualified child	€29.80

The Deputy needs to bear in mind that Circular 13 of 1975 was never intended to provide a general exception to the retirement age of 65 years of age.

Departments have delegated sanction to apply the hardship rules to staff members who are due to retire at 65 years of age although they may seek advice from my Department.

Information readily available from my Department on retentions is only available for the period 2011 to 2017 and is as follows:

Year	No. of Applications	No. of Applicants retained
2011	8	8
2012	11	10
2013	16	16
2014	14	14
2015	23	21
2016	17	8
2017	5	1

However, the information may not be complete if departments/offices retained staff under the hardship rule.

The Deputy may be aware that there are a number of cases taken by individuals to the Workplace Relations Commission arguing that the current retirement age of 65 years is discriminatory on equality grounds. The advice available to me is that providing general exceptions to the retirement age of 65 years or other retirement ages could undermine the legal basis of these ages.

On foot of one of the recommendations of the Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked to review the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension. This review is currently underway and is expected to be completed by the end of the current quarter. Future policy in this area will be considered by Government following the outcome of this review.

Question No. 378 answered with Question No. 373.

Office of Public Works Properties

379. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the Office of Public Works commissioned document Towards a Liffey Valley Park; if there has been correspondence between the Office of Public Works and the local authorities since the publication of that document to seek updates regarding steps the local authorities are taking to implement the recommendations of that document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27401/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Management of the lands referred to, which were acquired by the Commissioners of Public Works in 2006, was passed, by agreement, to the Local Authorities, also referred to in the question. The Commissioners have not been appraised of definitive development plans for the lands.

Question No. 380 answered with Question No. 353.

Public Procurement Contracts

381. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which he can reconcile the prohibitive turnover criteria and other discriminatory exclusionist criteria for contractors to qualify to tender for State contract works; his plans to rectify this discriminatory practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27536/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public sector organisations are required to adhere to EU and national procurement rules. The Office of Public Works has embarked on a process of putting framework contracts in place across many areas of operations including the electrical and mechanical area. In establishing such frameworks assessment criteria are necessary to form judgements as to the capacity and capability of applicant contractors. Turnover is one such metric. The intention is to set turnover and other criteria to as minimum a level as possible relative to the scale of the work involved. This can be a difficult balance to set as, while a contracting authority will wish to admit as many suitable applicants as possible, it will also wish to ensure that applicants have sufficient capacity and

scale to undertake the works involved. It is not practical to set turnover and other criteria in all cases that provide opportunity for all contractors. Some contractors will inevitably fail to meet the criteria set but, as stated, the objective is to admit as many suitable contractors as possible. Assessment criteria will be kept under constant review and any appropriate adjustments made to foster optimum tender competitions.

Departmental Expenditure

382. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27714/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that neither my Department nor any of the bodies under the aegis of my Department have availed of the services of the company referenced in the question.

Pension Provisions

383. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the body that pays the shortfall in transfer value in circumstances in which the benefits accruing to a member of a pension scheme in a public service transfer network organisation have been reduced on foot of a section 50 direction with the effect that the transfer value paid by the transferring organisation is reduced but the amount of transfer value payable in respect of that member by the receiving organisation must still reflect the full period of service in the organisation they are being transferred from. [27730/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Sector Transfer Network allows employees to transfer service from one member organisation to another. The legislative provision for this is Section 4 of the Superannuation and Pensions Act 1963. It provides for the transfer of pensionable service in the case of staff transfers between the Civil Service and "approved organisations", and between one "approved organisation" and another. The Act provides that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform may, by Statutory Instrument, designate an organisation as an "approved organisation" for the purpose of that Section. Membership of the Transfer network is entirely voluntary and organisations may, if they wish, apply to join provided they have a pension scheme which would be considered compatible with Public Service pension arrangements and could comply with the rules of the Transfer Network.

Section 50 of the Pensions act 1990 applies to funded pension schemes and provides a mechanism whereby once a fund is in difficulty it can reduce the amount of transfer value it will pay in respect of transfers out of the fund. This method is primarily aimed at transfers between two funded schemes with the reduced benefits moving to the new fund and the individual suffers any loss.

In the public service transfer network (PSTN) transfers from funded schemes are processed using what is known as a 16(d) transfer. In a 16(d) case the transfer value is calculated in accordance with the actuarial tables provided for under the PSTN. The PSTN has no mechanism for accepting transfers at less than full value.

Pension Levy

384. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the timescales involved for the unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2013 for retired public servants under the public service pension reduction will be given the same parity and fairness in any future pay deal as allowed to current working public servants in view of the scale of the difference in the reductions applied between the retired and working public servants in the past; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27740/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) reduces the value of those public service pensions which have pre-PSPR values above specified thresholds. It does so in a progressively structured way which has a proportionately greater effect on higher value pensions.

A very significant part-unwinding of PSPR in three stages is taking place under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR cuts on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018.

This three-stage part-unwinding of PSPR is delivering significant pensions increases to PSPR-affected pensioners. On 1 January 2016 all pensions of up to at least €18,700 became exempt from PSPR; from 1 January 2017, all pensions of up to at least €26,000 are now exempt from PSPR, and from 1 January 2018 all pensions of up to at least €34,132 per year will be exempt from PSPR. Those pensioners not fully removed from the reach of PSPR by dint of these changes will, in the majority of cases, benefit by €1,680 per year from 2018. The cost of these changes is estimated at about €90 million on a full-year basis from 2018.

Under section 12 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2013, I as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform am required to review the necessity of the FEMPI legislation annually and cause a written report of my findings to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas. The next report is due by end June 2017 and in the context of that report, I shall review the scope of the existing financial emergency measures and the possible further scale-back of those measures, including the PSPR.

Question No. 385 answered with Question No. 353.

Revenue Commissioners

386. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the requests received by his Department from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners regarding recruiting additional personnel to fill vacant posts in 2016 and to date in 2017; the date on which the request was received; the title of the position; if the vacancy in question related to a new or existing post; if the request was accepted or refused; the status of accepted requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27849/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Action 18 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan 2014 committed to giving greater authority and flexibility to managers to enhance public services while reducing costs and increasing efficiencies within centrally determined expenditure limits and pay rates. This has involved the setting down of binding multi-annual pay allocations centrally which have replaced the Employment Control Framework for Departments as the basis for resource management. It has also involved delegating the scope to determine staffing levels and grade mix to Heads of Departments on a phased

basis with the exception of Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) posts.

As a direct result of these delegated staffing arrangements, there have only been two requests to my Department for sanction to fill positions from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners since 1 January 2016, as detailed in the following table:

Date of request	Title of position	No. of posts	New or Existing	Accepted/Refused
15 July 2016	Dog Handlers (Clerical Officer with an allowance)	6	New	Accepted
27 February 2017	State Solicitors - AP Higher level	4	New	Under Consideration

Further to these requests, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners has supplied the attached table of appointments made since 1 January 2016, which fall under the delegated staffing arrangements which are in place between my Department and that Office.

Revenue Appointments from Open Recruitment*

Recruitment		
Grade Level	2016	201731 May
Principal	5(5)	2(2)
Assistant Principal	29(17)	13(10)
Solicitor	0	3(3)
Statistician	0	0
Economist	0	0
Administrative Officer	60(18)	5(4)
Higher Executive Officer	15(13)	36(29)
Executive Officer	207(67)	114(39)
Staff Officer	0	0
Clerical Officer	219	89
Service Officer	10	1
Totals	545(120)	263(87)

* Brackets denotes staff already serving in Revenue

Revenue Internal Promotions

Internal Promotions		
Grade Level	2016	201731 May
Principal	2	0
Assistant Principal	18	10
Higher Executive Officer	60	18
Executive Officer	84	42
Staff Officer	18	3
Clerical Officer	0	0
Service Officer	0	0
Total	182	73

Appointments to State Boards

387. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if any former TDs have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the public appointments service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27864/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Board of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) is the only State Board under the aegis of my Department. PAS took on an enhanced role in relation to State Boards following a Government decision in September 2014 and new Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards have been in operation since November 2014.

I am informed by the PAS that no former TDs have been appointed to the PAS Board.

Departmental Schemes

388. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if payments under the 1984 Civil Service spouses' and children's superannuation scheme are compulsory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27871/17]

389. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there are exemptions under the 1984 Civil Service spouses' and children's superannuation scheme depending on marital status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27872/17]

390. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there are exemptions under the 1984 Civil Service spouses' and children's superannuation scheme depending on parental status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27873/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 388 to 390, inclusive, together.

The Revised Spouses and Childrens Superannuation Scheme was introduced in 1984. Membership of this scheme is mandatory for anybody who joined the civil service as a new entrant after 1 September 1984. Civil Servants who were not members of any scheme or were members of the Original Scheme prior to this date had the option to join if they so wished.

The Revised Scheme which was introduced in agreement with staff interests, extended the benefits payable to include post-retirement marriages and also extended the children's benefit to include adoptive, post-retirement/resignation and non-marital children of the member.

Member contributions are compulsory under the Revised Scheme and there are no exemptions available based on marital or parental status. The Original Scheme provided for a refund of contributions where a member retired unmarried but as the Revised Scheme covers post-retirement events, no such refund is now available. In certain circumstances where a member has in excess of 40 years' service, they are entitled to a refund in respect of the excess period only, starting with the initial contributions paid.

Postal Codes

391. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode sys-

tem in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28144/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that there were no costs incurred by my Department in its implementation of the Eircode system. Eircodes were incorporated into new stationery when existing stocks were depleted at no extra cost.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has overall responsibility for the Eircode system.

Public Sector Pensions

392. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to restore public service pensions for retired public servants in parallel with the new WRC pay agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28180/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the past, the occupational pensions of public service pensioners were generally adjusted in line with changes in the wages or salary of the pensioner's grade at retirement. Sometimes referred to as "pay parity", this non-statutory linkage lapsed in 2010, when the values of pensions in payment were left unchanged notwithstanding salary cuts at the beginning of that year which affected all public servants under the financial emergency legislation.

Due to a grace period associated with the 2010 salary cuts, public servants, who retired in the 26 months following those cuts, i.e. in the period to end-February 2012, had their pensions based on the higher pre-cut salary levels. This has led to the current situation whereby post February-2012 retirees, on a like-for-like basis, mostly receive lower pensions than their earlier-retired counterparts.

In addition, since the beginning of 2011 a progressively-structured "Public Service Pension Reduction" (PSPR) has decreased the values of public service pensions above specified thresholds. A significant part-reversal or unwinding of PSPR is under way as set out in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015.

The lapsing of pay parity along with the pension differential arising between pre and post-2012 retirees, have created the conditions under which, as we move beyond "FEMPI" legislation and the progressive removal of the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) towards more normal pay and pension setting conditions in the public service, the issue of how to adjust the post-award value of public service pensions, through appropriate pay or other linkages has required consideration.

In this context, Section 6.2 of the proposed Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, which was published last week, indicates that, over the duration of that agreement if ratified, policy on public service pensions in payment will be guided by the following three elements:

First, the need to adopt an equitable approach to the various public service pensioner cohorts differentiated by date of retirement (in particular pre and post end-February 2012) is affirmed.

Second, for those who retired or will retire post end-February 2012, to the extent that they retired on reduced salaries for pension award purposes, they will receive pension increases in line with pay increases received by their peers currently in employment in accordance with the terms of the collective agreement.

Third, when alignment is achieved between pre and post end-February 2012 pensioners, as will happen progressively for salary ranges up to €70,000 in 2020 under the proposed collective agreement, pay increases will continue to benefit pensions in payment for the duration of the agreement.

Public Sector Staff Sick Leave

393. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if public servants that are ill on a Thursday or Friday of any week and submit the necessary medical certification are recorded as being absent on the following Saturday and Sunday and possible bank holiday even though they do not normally work on such days; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28232/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Sick Leave Scheme was introduced in March 2014 in the majority of sectors in the Public Service and in September 2014 in the Education Sector.

The Public Service Management Sick Leave Regulations 2014[1] provide the basis for the calculation of access to paid sick leave and sick leave records, including counting a Saturday or Sunday.

The following sets out the process, based on the Regulations, for calculating absence periods arising from sick leave in the context of the working week being Monday to Friday. Similar principles are applied in relation to other working patterns.

- A Saturday and Sunday are only counted towards an individual's sick leave record if the sick leave spans the weekend. An absence on a Friday followed by an absence on the Monday is considered to have spanned the weekend.

- Sick leave that spans a weekend will include the weekend, and in this example will be counted as four days of sick leave as it includes Saturday and Sunday.

In contrast:

- If a public servant was absent on a Friday and returned on a Monday the Saturday and Sunday would not be included as the absence did not span the weekend.

Treatment of Bank Holidays:

- In the event of a Bank Holiday weekend the Bank Holiday would be considered as part of the weekend. If the sick leave spanned the weekend i.e. the employee was out sick on the Tuesday after a bank holiday, it would be counted as five days sick leave.

- In contrast, if the individual was absent on a Friday of a Bank Holiday weekend and returned to work on the Tuesday it would be counted as one days sick leave.

It is also important to note that in accordance with Section 21 of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997, a public servant who is absent from work on certified sick leave immediately before and including a public holiday is entitled to benefit from that public holiday.

[1] the Public Service Management (Sick Leave) Regulations 2014 S.I. No. 124 of 2014 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/si/124/made/en/pdf>

Departmental Agencies Funding

394. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the way in which an institute (details supplied) is funded; the amount of funding it received on an annual basis in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28283/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Institute of Public Administration has two main sources of funding, namely, earned fee income and a State block grant. The Institute's earnings over the past five years were made up of training and international services, education-fee income, research income, publications, membership income, release of capital grants, and the grant allocation from my Department.

The table below, which has been provided by the IPA, sets out its funding sources over the last five years. These figures are also available in the IPA's published annual financial statements.

Year	Total Income €	Earned Income €	Grant €
2012	10,888,671	8,138,671	2,750,000
2013	10,640,802	7,890,802	2,750,000
2014	10,910,348	8,160,348	2,750,000
2015	10,985,903	8,260,903	2,725,000
2016	11,853,463	9,128,463	2,725,000

Public Service Pay Commission

395. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to unwind the pay and pension inequality in his annual review of FEMPI measures due before Dáil Éireann by the end of June 2017; his further plans regarding the restoration of pay for teachers and the ending of PSPR in view of the fact that the financial crisis has ended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28411/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following publication of the Report by the Public Service Pay Commission, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and public service employers entered into negotiations with public service unions and staff representative associations in order to secure agreement on an extension of the Lansdowne Road Agreement. Following detailed and complex negotiations, facilitated by the Workplace Relations Commission, the terms of a proposed Agreement was commended to the parties by the Workplace Relations Commission. The proposed agreement, which deals with the further orderly unwinding of FEMPI reductions in a manner that is compatible with fiscal constraints, is available on my Department's website <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/government-approves-terms-of-proposed-extension-to-the-lansdowne-road-agreement/>

I am obliged under Section 13 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act (FEMPI) 2013 to carry out an annual review of the operation of the FEMPI Acts. My next review and report on the FEMPI legislation is due before the Houses of the Oireachtas before the end of June 2017. My considerations and report, which will encompass all measures provided for under the FEMPI legislation will, inter alia, take into account the current budgetary and economic context and the outcome to the recent public service pay negotiations.

Public Sector Pensions Data

396. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated annual cost over the next four years of the public pension contribution reforms agreed in June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28418/17]

397. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated annual cost over the next four years of the public sector pay changes agreed with unions in June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28419/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 396 and 397 together.

The proposed Agreement runs from 2018- 2020 and has a total cost over that period of €887 million, with annual costs as follows:

2018: €178 million

2019: €370 million

2020: €339 million

The pay measures also have a carry-over cost into 2021 of €227 million.

The costs of the proposed pension contribution reforms are included in the annual cost outlined above. The yield from PRD will fall from over €700 million at present to some €550 million in 2020 which will now become a permanent additional pension contribution. These reforms will make a major contribution to the future sustainability of public service pensions.

Public Private Partnerships

398. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a review is planned on the role of PPP's and the rules surrounding them; when such a review will take place and be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28420/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that a mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway, the findings of which will ultimately help Government to put in place a new long term Capital Plan which is consistent with the new National Planning Framework to be published later this year.

In that context, Government needs to formulate a strategic view on the extent to which PPPs should be used to assist in delivering additional infrastructure, to complement that provided directly with Exchequer funding.

With that in mind, I asked my Department to review our experience of using PPPs and to advise on the scope for further use of this procurement option in the context of the Government's capital investment plans.

A senior level group has been established to assist my Department in this regard, comprising relevant officials from the Departments with experience of procuring projects by PPP, together with the Department of Finance, the National Development Finance Agency and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. This group is reviewing past experience with PPPs and its report, once complete, will provide an evidence based analysis of the potential for further use of PPPs, and concessions, as a procurement option for the delivery of additional capital infrastructure as part of the new long term capital plan. Assessing the affordability, sustainability and value-for-money of PPP procurement will be key elements of the Group's work, while the Group will

also have the opportunity to make recommendations in relation to other aspects of PPP policy and guidance, if appropriate.

The report of the Inter-departmental group will help inform a final decision on how to proceed in relation to off-balance sheet PPPs in the context of the new long-term capital plan to be published later this year.

Public Sector Pensions

399. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the schedule for the full restoration of pensions which have been the subject of FEMPI deductions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28519/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) reduces the value of those public service pensions which have pre-PSPR values above specified thresholds. It does so in a progressively structured way which has a proportionately greater effect on higher value pensions.

A very significant part-unwinding of PSPR in three stages is taking place under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR cuts on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018.

On 1 January 2016 all pensions of up to at least €18,700 became exempt from PSPR; from 1 January 2017, all pensions of up to at least €26,000 are now exempt from PSPR, and from 1 January 2018 all pensions of up to at least €34,132 per year will be exempt from PSPR. Those pensioners not fully removed from the reach of PSPR by dint of these changes will, in the majority of cases, benefit by €1,680 per year from 2018. The cost of these changes is estimated at about €90 million on a full-year basis from 2018.

Under section 12 of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2013, I as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform am required to review the necessity of the FEMPI legislation annually and cause a written report of my findings to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas. The next report is due by end June 2017 and in the context of that report, I shall review the scope of the existing financial emergency measures including the PSPR.

Register of Lobbyists Administration

400. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is an appeal system for voluntary non-profit bodies that owing to circumstances beyond their control did not make a lobbying return before the deadline and are now subject to a €200 fine. [28630/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the Standards in Public Office Commission (the Standards Commission) is an independent statutory body which is responsible for the Register of Lobbying. As an independent statutory body it is not accountable to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform or to the Government in the performance of its functions.

I am advised that the Standards Commission does not exercise any discretion in relation to the issuing of Fixed Payment Notices. The Register (“lobbying.ie”) has been designed to automatically issue a Fixed Payment Notice to any registrant who submits a late return. A Fixed

20 June 2017

Payment Notice has, therefore, issued to anyone who has submitted a late return of their lobbying activities for the periods 1 September 2016 – 31 December 2016 and 1 January

2017 – 30 April 2017. (The respective relevant dates for receipt of these returns was 21 January 2017 and 21 May 2017.)

I am advised that the Standards Commission has issued reminders to all registrants at the end of each return period and again prior to each return deadline to ensure that they are aware of the pending deadline. These reminders included details of the offences and penalties for failing to submit a return by the statutory deadline. The Standards Commission has also strongly encouraged registrants to identify back-up administrators in the event that the primary “lobbying.ie” account administrator is unable to file the return by the deadline.

I am also advised that the Standards Commission has, in a small number of cases, exercised some discretion in cancelling a Fixed Payment Penalty. This has only happened, however, where the Standards Commission has been satisfied that a technical issue with “lobbying.ie” may have contributed to the person submitting a late return or where the registrant had misunderstood the requirements of the Act and was not actually required to register.

I am advised that the Standards Commission has not cancelled any Fixed Payment Penalties where the failure to submit a return on time was due to an administrative failure by an organisation or due to an oversight or human error on the part of the person submitting the return.

The Act does not provide for an appeal process in relation to the issuing of Fixed Payment Notices. Section 21(5) of the Act provides that the Standards Commission may proceed to prosecute the offence of submitting a late return if the person does not pay the Fixed Payment by the specified date.

Section 20(3) of the Act provides that it shall be a defence in proceedings for an offence for a person to prove that the person took all reasonable steps to avoid the commission of the offence.

In considering whether to proceed with a prosecution under section 21(5) of the Act, the Standards Commission have advised that they will consider any representations or explanations provided in relation to the submission of a late return and the payment of the Fixed Payment.

The Deputy might wish to advise the voluntary body concerned to contact the Standards Commission directly. They can be contacted by:-

Address: 18 Lower Leeson Street,

Dublin 2, D02 HE97

Phone: +353-1-639 5722

Email: info@lobbying.ie.

Public Procurement Contracts

401. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to ensure that small suppliers can compete for State contracts; if the barriers to competing for State contracts such as the scale of contracts such as the turnover required and so on are removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28646/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers the best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to favour particular candidates on grounds such as organisation size, locality, nationality, etc. and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

However, there is a recognition at EU Level of the need to promote and facilitate SME participation in public procurement. The new EU Directives on Procurement, transposed into Irish law in May 2016, are intended to make it easier for businesses and SMEs to tender for public sector procurement contracts. Measures specifically designed to improve access for SMEs and start-ups include:

- financial capacity criterion is generally limited to twice contract value - there are no centrally imposed requirements for a minimum turnover. Establishing the appropriate suitability criteria that are relevant and appropriate to a particular contract is, of course, a matter for the contracting authority concerned. This is because the contracting authority is in the best position to gauge the appropriate levels of financial capacity that are appropriate to the needs of that specific contract.

- discretion to divide public contracts into lots, with the proviso that opting not to divide a contract into lots must be explained in the procurement documents or the report on the procurement process

- electronic methods of communication are mandated in parts of the tender process

- the introduction of the European Single Procurement Document (ESPD), a self-declaration form aimed at reducing red tape for suppliers

- provision for “consortia bidding” may assist SMEs to participate in procurement procedures where they would not have the relevant capability or scale if they were to bid as sole tenderers

- explicit provision for pre-market discussion with suppliers and independent experts, subject to safeguards against distorting competition or violating transparency and non-discrimination principles

- reductions in the time limits for receipt of tenders by approximately 30% compared to the position under the 2006 Regulations

- Member States are required to report back to the Commission every 3 years on SME participation in public procurement

A number of these measures had been accelerated into policy in 2014 in advance of the transposition of the new Directives by Circular 10/14 - Initiatives to assist SMEs in Public Procurement - issued by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP). The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. The OGP works with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly. It does this by facilitating quarterly meetings of an SME Advisory Group, which have been chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for public procurement, so that the voice of Irish SMEs (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) can be heard by Government. SMEs are also encouraged to register with the Government’s eTenders portal so that they can be notified of upcoming tendering opportunities.

The OGP works with the SME industry representative bodies as well as the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, InterTrade Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to promote the engagement of SMEs in public procurement. Evidence of the work and co-operation in the area can be seen in events such as “Go-2-Tender” workshops and “Meet the Buyer” events.

Minister of State Eoghan Murphy launched the OGP’s 2014 Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis Report in September 2016. The data analysed indicates that 95% of the State’s expenditure is with firms within the State and the majority of spend analysed is with SMEs.

The OGP will continue to proactively engage with business and strive to enhance the significant measures already in place to support SME access to public procurement opportunities.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

402. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all State bodies under the aegis of his department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28674/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies applies to the Regulator of the National Lottery. The Regulator has furnished a report confirming that he complied with his obligations under tax law for 2015. The Regulator has complied with his obligations under tax law for 2016 and this will be formally confirmed following completion of the audit of the Regulator’s accounts for 2016.

The Institute of Public Administration and the Economic and Social Research Institute are not State bodies. However, as they receive funds from the Department, some aspects of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies apply to them. Both organisations complied with their obligations under tax law for 2015. The 2016 position will be formally confirmed following their respective Annual General Meetings which are scheduled to take place shortly.

Litter Pollution

403. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if dog fouling prevention measures including bins, bags and appropriate signage can be put in place at a location (details supplied) in County Cork. [28680/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Dog-litter bins and associated signage will be provided at this site shortly.

Garda Station Closures

404. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to address the future use of a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28692/17]

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

Boxer Moran): The new Garda station at Mulgannon Road, Wexford Town is scheduled to be completed and ready for occupation in September 2017.

When An Garda Síochána vacate the existing station at Roche's Road, Wexford, OPW Property Management Division will examine the property to establish if there is any alternative State use for it.

I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that on completion of this examination a decision on the future use of the property will be made.

Public Procurement Contracts

405. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the awarding of a tender (details supplied). [28710/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Following a public procurement process a contract for the Tea Room concession was awarded to Messrs. Brambles Deli Café Ltd. The initial contract period is for 12 calendar months from 1st February 2017. Subject to review consideration will be given to extending this concession for a further period.

Appointments to State Boards

406. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of appointments made to the boards of State bodies under the remit of his Department in May and June 2017; the dates of the appointments; the State bodies involved; the application process that was followed; the number of vacancies left on the boards of State bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28858/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The boards of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) are the only State boards under the remit of my Department.

No appointments were made to the PAS board in May or June 2017.

There was one appointment made to the IPA board on 16 May 2017 in line with the Institute's memorandum and articles of association. The new member is a representative of the commercial state agency sector and was nominated by the Association of CEOs of Commercial State Agencies. There are no remaining vacancies on the Institute's board.

Departmental Properties

407. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of houses his Department owns in Templemore, County Tipperary; the location of each; the purpose for which they are used; and if his Department has had communications with Tipperary County Council regarding their use for social housing. [28879/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that there are 14 houses in State ownership in Templemore. They are as follows –

No.	Address	Use
1	The Mall	Occupied by An Garda Síochána
3	The Mall	For disposal
4	The Mall	For disposal
5	The Mall	For disposal
6	The Mall	Occupied by An Garda Síochána
9	Church Avenue	For disposal
10	Church Avenue	For disposal
11	Church Avenue	Used by Garda Training College
12	Church Avenue	Used by Garda Training College
2	Manna South	Occupied by An Garda Síochána
3	Televera	Sale agreed
4	Televera	Occupied by An Garda Síochána
Bungalow	Televera	Templemore Flood Relief Scheme
Dromard House	Dromore, Clonmore,	Vacant, part of Garda Tactical Training facility

The five properties identified above for disposal were offered to Tipperary County Council in 2016 under the protocols set out in *Circular 11/15: Protocols for the Transfer and Sharing of State Property Assets*. The Council declined the offer to acquire the properties.

Departmental Staff Relocation

408. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29043/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that during the period from 2014 to date in 2017, in my Department there were seventeen staff who transferred to offices located outside the Dublin region. The information requested by the Deputy is laid out in the tables below.

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Core)

Year	Grade	Region	Relocation Cost
2014	Administrative Officer	Limerick	Nil
2014	Assistant Principal	Galway	Nil

National Shared Services Office (NSSO) Staff

Year	Grade	Region	External/Internal Transfer	Relocation Cost
2015	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Higher Executive Officer	Galway	Internal	Nil
2016	Executive Officer	Cavan	External	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Dundalk	External	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Tullamore	Internal	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Wexford	External	Nil
2016	Clerical Officer	Wicklow	External	Nil
2017	Higher Executive Officer	Galway	Internal	Nil
2017	Clerical Officer	Donegal	External	Nil

Office of Government Procurement (OGP)

Year	Grade	Region	External/Internal Transfer	Relocation Cost
2016	Category Specialist (EO equivalent)	Trim	Internal	Nil
2016	Category Specialist (EO equivalent)	Tullamore	External	Nil

Information is not available on actual transfer applications as where staff apply for a transfer, these requests are usually made directly to the department/office they are looking to transfer to.

Office of Public Works Properties

409. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the OPW funding for the renovation of Abbotstown House; the timeline of works for its renovation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29047/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The OPW does not own the property at Abbotstown House. That property in question is owned by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine who have ultimate responsibility for the maintenance and renovation of same.

School Staff

410. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide extra funding to address funding deficiencies in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26534/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

Staffing arrangements for the 2017/18 school year are set out in circular 0017/2017 which is available on my Departments website.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an appeal for consideration by the Appeals Board for the April 2017 meeting of the board under the EAL criteria. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board refused on the basis that the projected EAL enrolment in the school on 30th September 2017 did not warrant the allocation of an additional post. The school has been notified accordingly. The Appeal Board operates independently of the Minister and the Department and its decision is final.

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.

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.

The process of supporting schools in the management of their resources under this process and the consideration of exceptional circumstances will take effect from September 2017, which is the time from which schools will begin to utilise their special education teaching allocations under the new model. Schools will be advised as to how this process will operate once the existing appeal process has been completed.

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 pu-

pils 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.

School Transport Eligibility

411. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review his Department's school transport policy in order to allow students from an area (details supplied) to avail of free school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26537/17]

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 my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest school as determined by my Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

The terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Fees

412. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will make arrangements with Bus Éireann to facilitate families to have the option of making payments on school transport fees on a monthly direct debit basis in order to help families that find the cost of making such payments in two instalments difficult; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26569/17]

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.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and routing of each dedicated school transport service which is determined by the number and location of children who are eligible for school transport each year. Annual charging, as opposed to term charging, was introduced in the 2009/10 school year with provision for the family payment to be made in two instalments in July and December. Families with children who are eligible for school transport and who hold

valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from the annual charge. Eligible children with special educational needs also travel free of charge. Invoices are issued by Bus Éireann in July of each year and each child who travels is allocated a seat for the school year.

Annual charging has enabled Bus Éireann to streamline the payments system and plan the allocation of tickets on an annual rather than term basis thus ensuring that route planning and seating arrangements were managed in a more efficient and cost effective manner. Given the complexity of the system and the necessity to plan for and provide seats for each eligible child availing of school transport services on vehicles for the full school year, it would not be practical to issue invoices, collect monies and allocate seating on a monthly basis.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

413. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will revise the regulations surrounding the student universal support grant in order that if a family's only income is from Department of Social Protection payments this will not place a student over the threshold for the special rate for disadvantaged students (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26582/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Student Grant Scheme for the academic year 2017/18, was published on the 31st of March 2017. The qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant is as follows:

1. The student must qualify for the standard rate of grant;
2. Total reckonable income, after income disregards and Child Dependant Increase(s) are excluded, must not exceed €23,000; and
3. As at 31st December 2016, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed in the Student Grant Scheme.

Jobseekers Allowance (where held for 391 days or more), is one of the qualifying long-term social welfare payments for the special rate of grant. If an applicant is in receipt of this payment and meets the other criteria for the special rate of grant then, she may qualify for the special rate of grant.

The decision on eligibility for a student grant is a matter for the relevant grant awarding authority. Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

It is not proposed to depart from the existing arrangements for the determination of the eligibility for the special rate of maintenance grant.

School Curriculum

414. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to review the curriculum for junior and leaving certificate cycle in respect of information technology studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26592/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan for Education 2017 provides that the new subject of Leaving Certificate Computer Science will be

implemented in schools from September 2018. The new subject specification is currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment through its subject development group for Computer Science. Phase 1 of the implementation process is scheduled to commence in September 2018 in a small number of schools, with the subject being available to all schools from September 2020.

Coding is one of the Junior Cycle short courses developed by the NCCA and available to schools.

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. The Strategy is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy. The Strategy states that all future curricula will include clear statements that focus on the development of digital learning skills and the use of ICT as a resource in achieving specific outcomes across the curriculum.

An Implementation Advisory Group has been established to guide the implementation of the digital strategy. Membership of the Group comprise representation from the Department, industry, academic experts, practitioners/teachers and representation from the tech voluntary sector.

My Department is currently finalising a 2017 Digital Strategy Action Plan which I expect to publish shortly.

Digital Strategy for Schools

415. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the recommended time on the curriculums in post primary school for the study of information technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26593/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are no times specified by my Department for the study of information technology. The Action Plan for Education 2017 provides that the new subject of Leaving Certificate Computer Science will be implemented in schools from September 2018. The new subject specification is currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment through its subject development group for Computer Science. Phase 1 of the implementation process is scheduled to commence in September 2018 in a small number of schools, with the subject being available to all schools from September 2020.

Coding is one of the Junior Cycle short courses available to schools.

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. The Strategy is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy. The Strategy states that all future curricula will include clear statements that focus on the development of digital learning skills and the use of ICT as a resource in achieving specific outcomes across the curriculum.

Digital Strategy for Schools

416. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on streaming in post primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26594/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Findings from research in this area suggest that there is no one system of organisational grouping or student placement that works equally well for all students. It suggests that the success or otherwise of ability groupings depends less on the actual grouping itself than on the philosophy and purpose underpinning the grouping, and how the composition of the class groups and the quality of teaching reflects the intended philosophy.

However, research published by the Economic and Social Research Institute in 2011 indicates that the streaming of students by ability in Ireland has an adverse affect on overall education standards. This research shows that students in lower streams tend to perform much worse when grouped together while students assigned to higher ability classes do not make corresponding gains, hence average student performance falls. Similar to research elsewhere, the ESRI review shows that teacher-student interaction is crucial to student outcomes and that the teaching methods employed by teachers make a difference in this regard.

In light of these findings, many post-primary schools have started to move from strict streaming of their students in first year and now group their students according to mixed ability for much of the junior cycle. However, it needs to be noted that mixed ability settings can take many forms.

Schools are advised to adopt flexible grouping strategies that reflect individual needs and strive to improve educational outcomes for all students. Schools are also advised to ensure that groupings are regularly monitored to enable changes to be made if necessary.

Digital Strategy for Schools

417. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the systems in place to ensure that information technology is taught to the correct standard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26595/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision for the role of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. The Strategy states that all future curricula will include clear statements that focus on the development of digital learning skills and the use of ICT as a resource in achieving specific outcomes across the curriculum.

The new subject of Leaving Certificate Computer Science will be implemented in schools from September 2018. The key skills in the Framework for Junior Cycle highlight the use of digital technologies across all subjects. At primary level the new Mathematics Curriculum, which is currently under development, will include computational thinking, creative thinking skills and coding.

One of the priority actions under the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 will be the development of a Digital Learning Framework for Teachers, based on the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework, to inform teacher training and professional development so teachers can better support students to become collaborative, problem solving, creative learners through using

ICT. The Framework is intended to inform educational policy makers, teacher-educators, providers of professional learning and working teachers on the role of ICT in educational reform.

The Strategy also commits to ensuring that all Department-funded training programmes for teachers will have the use of digital technologies embedded in their design, development and delivery. Guidance and examples of good practice on the effective and critical use of digital technologies for teaching, learning and assessment will be further expanded on for use by teachers.

School Transport Eligibility

418. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if secondary school students holding full medical cards are entitled to free school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26605/17]

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 the Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge.

School Transport Eligibility

419. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schedule under which medical card holders can avail of free or discounted school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26606/17]

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.

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying annual charges.

Schools Building Projects Status

420. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school building application by a school (details supplied). [26610/17]

451. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school building application by a school (details supplied). [26765/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 420 and 451 together.

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

My Department has identified a suitable site as a permanent location for the school and the acquisition process is underway. Discussions are ongoing in relation to the provision of access to the site and my Department is liaising with the Local Authority in this regard.

I can assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a new site for the school is a priority for my Department and it is my Department's intention to complete this process as expeditiously as possible.

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

Departmental Correspondence

421. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 108 of 5 May 2017, the information which remains outstanding from a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that it is its understanding that all requested information was provided in 2016. [26614/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has contacted the school in question regarding the outstanding information and the principal has undertaken to provide the information in due course.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

422. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary can be provided with extra special needs hours to meet the needs of their students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26615/17]

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, including the school to which the Deputy has referred, will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

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

The additional funding will provide 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.

In relation to the particular school referred to by the Deputy, this school had a Learning Support allocation of 10 hours for the 2016/17 school year, which combined with 6.80 resource teaching hours allocated to the school by the National Council for Special Education, gave a total allocation to the school of 16.80 additional teaching hours for the 2016/17 school year.

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

The special education teaching allocation for this school for 2017/18 is 16.80 hours.

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

The NCSE published details of an appeals process on the NCSE website: www.ncse.ie whereby schools could appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

Schools who wished to submit an appeal were asked to do so by March 31st 2017.

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

The NCSE has advised that the school referred to in this question has not submitted an appeal.

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

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

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

423. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of appeals personnel working at Caranua; if they are full time or part time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26626/17]

424. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of appeals awaiting decision up to six months, 12 months, 18 months and two years at Caranua, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26627/17]

425. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the length of time it is anticipated to take to clear the backlog of appeals at Caranua; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26628/17]

426. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the appropriate time period for persons to wait before their appeal is decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26629/17]

427. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will arrange for advocates acting on behalf of survivors and a delegation of survivors to meet the newly appointed appeals officer in order to avoid any inference of bias in view of the fact that meetings between Caranua and the appeals office take place regularly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26630/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 423 to 427, inclusive, together.

Section 21 of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 provides for the appointment of one or more persons to act as appeals officers to consider appeals against decisions of Caranua. The Act provides that the appeals officer shall be independent in the performance of his or her functions. While my Department provides administrative support to the appeals officer I, as Minister, have no role in the appeals process. Similarly the appeals process operates completely independently of Caranua.

I have recently appointed two new appeals officers who will be remunerated on a case by case basis. In appointing two appeals officers instead of just replacing the one appeals officer who has stepped down, I took cognizance of the backlog of appeals and would expect that this backlog would be reduced or eliminated over the course of the next 12 months.

I am advised that there are 148 cases outstanding. There are 45 applicants waiting up to 6 months, 62 between 6 and 12 months and 41 over 12 months.

For an appeals system to provide a service to appellants, the appellants shouldn't have to wait an inordinate amount of time for a decision. However, it should be recognised that some cases are going to be more complex than others and that where a case is complex and requires further information or consolidation of information or maybe an oral hearing that this is going to require additional time.

The legislation provides for oral hearings for the hearing of appeals. The legislation doesn't provide for meetings between the appeals officers and advocate groups or survivor representatives.

Teacher Redeployment

428. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) is eligible for panel rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26653/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

Applicants must meet all of the published criteria in order to gain access to the Supplementary Redeployment Panel.

The teacher referred to by the Deputy failed to meet the criteria and is therefore ineligible to be included on the Supplementary Redeployment Panel.

Schools Building Projects Status

429. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a traffic survey relating to an application for works by a school (details supplied); and the timeframe for progressing the application. [26693/17]

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

The school will be aware that preparatory work has been initiated to advance this project including the technical assessment of the traffic survey. My Department will continue to liaise directly with the school authorities concerned in the context of progressing the project through the architectural planning process.

State Examinations

430. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which his Department distributes State exam papers; if there is a tendering or recruitment process in place for distribution; and the details of the tendering process in place for the printing of State exam papers. [26695/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Schools Property

431. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding schools that need new car parking facilities; and the funding is available to them for same. [26699/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is open to schools to apply for grant under Summer Works Schemes for improved car-parking facilities within the vested school site if schools consider the works to be a priority.

It is also open to primary schools to use their minor works grant, in full or in part, for works of this nature.

Schools Building Projects Status

432. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a new building will be provided for a school (details supplied). [26716/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has been working tirelessly to resolve this matter. This is a very complex planning issue concerning site access. Planning permission for the school to which the Deputy refers has been sought and rejected twice.

My Department is working with Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to advance proposals for appropriate access routes with a view to progressing a further planning application.

The County Council's preferred option for access to this site involves lands that do not belong to my Department so negotiations are currently ongoing with both the Council and relevant third-party private landowners to reach agreement on access.

When these discussions have been concluded, a new planning application for permanent school buildings will be submitted.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

433. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the special needs supports available for a person suffering from Asperger's syndrome who does not feel they can attend mainstream secondary school any longer. [26720/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, 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 National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016)

found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE policy advice noted that ASD is a spectrum condition, so some students with ASD require little support in school and are relatively independent in their learning, while others require significant levels of support.

The NCSE Policy Advice also states that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

It follows therefore that where they are able, students should be given every opportunity to achieve in mainstream settings and only enrolled/retained in special class and/or special school settings where their need necessitates this.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department 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.

Resources which are provided to schools to support children with Autism include the following:

- 2,200 extra teachers in mainstream schools specifically to support children with Autism.
- 889 special classes for students with autism – up from fewer than 80 in 2001.
- 20 special schools specifically for students with Autism
- One teacher and a minimum of two SNAs for every primary special class of six students with ASD and 1.5 teachers and a minimum of two SNAs for every post-primary special class.
- SNA support – About 69% of all students with ASD access SNA support.
- Assistive technology.
- Professional development for teachers.
- Access to the Special School transport scheme.
- Access to special equipment and furniture where required.
- Enhanced capitation grant.
- Adapted school buildings.
- Access to the extended school year scheme. (July Provision)

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.

Where students with an ASD experience difficulties, the first course of action is engagement with first level services provided by the Department of Education and Skills (National Educational Psychological Service, Special Education Support Service, National Behavioural Support Service, National Council for Special Education) and Health Services Executive (HSE)/HSE funded services.

If a parent of a student feels that a student is currently experiencing continuing difficulties they should request through their school a multi-disciplinary school based review involving NEPS, the local SENO and other relevant professionals.

Schools Building Projects Status

434. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the next phase of a school building for a school (details supplied) will commence; the status of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26731/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project referred to by the Deputy was authorised to proceed to tender in October 2016.

However, as the pre-qualification of contractors had first been conducted by the design team in April 2015 the design team, concerned about the possibility of legal challenges, asked the Office of Government Procurement for advice on this matter. The advice was that it would be prudent to run the pre-qualification again.

The Design Team has rerun the pre-qualification of suitable contractors and the project is now out to tender. Tenders are due back in mid July.

Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in late 2017 and the project is scheduled to take approximately 18 months to complete.

Schools Site Acquisitions

435. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new site for a school (details supplied) as announced in November 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26732/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the building project for the school in question is included on my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department have worked closely with officials from the relevant Local Authority under the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the acquisition of a suitable permanent location for the school. A suitable site has been identified and my officials are working to advance its acquisition.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time.

Questions - Written Answers
Schools Building Projects

436. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Malahide and Portmarnock areas of County Dublin as announced in November 2015; if he has identified locations for these proposed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26733/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Patron of the new Malahide/Portmarnock post-primary school (Educate Together) has decided for operational reasons that it is in the best interests of the school to postpone its opening to September 2018. My Department has been working in close co-operation with Educate Together to facilitate the opening of the school and will continue to do so with a view to its opening in suitable interim accommodation in September 2018.

Where a requirement for additional post-primary schools has been identified, details including proposed timelines related to the opening of the schools are made known by a Ministerial announcement. However, patrons may decide for different operational reasons in a particular year that it is in the best interests of a new post-primary school to defer its opening. In some cases there may be a timing issue, where many parents will have already committed to other second level schools in the area ahead of the announcement of the new school.

Schools Building Projects

437. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Swords area of County Dublin as announced in November 2015; if he has identified locations for these proposed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26734/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Patron of the new Swords post-primary school, Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) has decided for operational reasons that it is in the best interests of the school to defer its opening to September 2018.

The Patron has confirmed to the Department that Swords Community College will open in September 2018, with a high number of applications having already been received.

The acquisition of school sites in densely populated areas such as Dublin/Swords presents an ongoing challenge for my Department as the availability of suitable property is often extremely limited, due to the area of accommodation and ancillary facilities required. My Department will continue to work in close co-operation with Fingal County Council and the site acquisition process is underway in respect of the permanent accommodation for this school.

Schools Building Projects Status

438. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a permanent site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26735/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the building project for the school in question is included in my Department's capital programme.

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

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

Departmental Properties

439. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in giving permission to a club (details supplied) in Tallaght, Dublin 24, in conjunction with a school to carry out proposed building work on lands currently under the control of his Department; if it is a shortage of staff in a particular section of his Department that is causing the years of delay; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these building works have the support of the entire local community and that the development would help eliminate anti-social behaviour in the immediate area. [26742/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials in my Department are aware that this matter has been ongoing for some time. I can confirm that officials from my Department have had consultations with the school authorities and other stakeholders on a number of occasions and have also been in ongoing correspondence with the club since the proposals were first made.

A joint technical inspection has been carried out by technical staff from my Department and South Dublin County Council and updated maps are currently being prepared. There are a number of legal and technical matters to be resolved pertaining to the proposal by the club referred to by the Deputy. Once these matters are resolved, my Department intends to meet with all stakeholders with a view to progressing matters as soon as possible for the benefit of the school and local community. Officials from my Department have recently been in contact with representatives from the club referred to by the Deputy and have provided an update on the current situation.

Departmental Properties

440. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date on which a club (details supplied) in Tallaght, Dublin 24, first contacted his Department seeking an agreement to build on lands currently under the control of his Department adjoining the club and a community school; and the length of time it is expected to wait until official permission is granted to begin the work. [26743/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials in my Department are aware that this matter has been ongoing for some time. I can confirm that officials from my Department have had consultations with the school authorities and other stakeholders on a number of occasions and have also been in ongoing correspondence with the club since the proposals were first made.

A joint technical inspection has been carried out by technical staff from my Department and South Dublin County Council and updated maps are currently being prepared. There are a number of legal and technical matters to be resolved pertaining to the proposal by the club referred to by the Deputy. Once these matters are resolved, my Department intends to meet

with all stakeholders with a view to progressing matters as soon as possible for the benefit of the school and local community. Officials from my Department have recently been in contact with representatives from the club referred to by the Deputy and have provided an update on the current situation.

Institutes of Technology

441. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the combined deficit institutes of technology face from satellite campuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26747/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates the recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and the internal disbursement of funding is then a matter for the individual institution.

A Financial Review of the Institutes of Technology sector was published in October 2016. The Report noted that these campuses provide a very important function for the delivery of education within their regions and present wider socio-economic benefits within rural communities.

However, my Department and the HEA recognise the particular challenges attached to multi-campus provision in higher education institutions. The HEA has begun a major review of the funding allocation model for higher education, and this review will include looking at how the future model can take account of the additional costs associated with such arrangements.

School Management

442. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider introducing one administration day per week for school principals in cases in which there is no walking principal; the cost of this measure; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26748/17]

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

Circular 12/2016, which is available on the Department website, outlines the number of days that teaching principals may take as release time in a school year in order to assist them fulfilling their principal duties. Under these arrangements my Department pays for a substitute teacher to be employed by a school to facilitate administrative functions to be undertaken by the teaching principal. Under the current arrangements the number of days that principal teachers may take as release time in each school year ranges between 15 and 25 days depending on the size of the school.

Enabling teaching principals to have one release day per week would cost in the order of €12.5 million per annum.

Apprenticeship Programmes

443. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the sources of funding that will be used for investment in apprenticeship reform up to 2020. [26753/17]

445. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding set aside for development and capital costs to deliver 40 new apprenticeship programmes up to 2020. [26755/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 443 and 445 together.

In 2017, €98.7m has been allocated for apprenticeship training which represents a 40% increase on the 2016 spend of €69.6m. This funding is being made available from exchequer and national training fund resources. Future years' allocations will be determined through the normal budgetary process which takes account of competing demands and the overall availability of resources.

Development and equipment costs for new programmes approved to date for funding is set out in the attached table, along with, where available, per capita operational costs. It should be noted that equipment and operational costs are only available for those new apprenticeships that have completed development and validation. Costs for further programmes will be determined as they move through development and validation and as new programmes are identified through the second call for proposals.

New Apprenticeship Programme Title	Lead provider	Projected Apprentice numbers	Development Funding Approved	Annual Unit Cost per apprentice*	Equipment Costs
Insurance Practice - Level 8	Institute of Technology Sligo	67 (actual 2016)	€15,000	€7,200	€0
Industrial Electrical Engineering – Level 7	Limerick Institute of Technology	12 (actual 2016)	€50,000	€10,000	€155,000
Polymer Process Engineer - Level 7	Athlone Institute of Technology	32	€135,000	€10,000	€400,000
Manufacturing Technician – Level 6	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (3 other co-ordinating providers)	60	€85,000	€10,000	€500,000
Manufacturing Engineer – Level 7	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (3 other co-ordinating providers)	60	€85,000	€10,000	€500,000
International Financial Services Associate - Level 6	National College of Ireland		€48,333		

Questions - Written Answers

New Apprenticeship Programme Title	Lead provider	Projected Apprentice numbers	Development Funding Approved	Annual Unit Cost per apprentice*	Equipment Costs
International Financial Services Specialist - Level 8	National College of Ireland		€48,333		
Accounting Technician Level 6	Accounting Technicians Ireland		€25,000		
OEM Engineer-Level 6	Cavan & Monaghan ETB		€15,000		
HGV Driver Level 5	Cavan & Monaghan ETB		€15,000		
Baker Level 6	Scottish Bakers		€76,250		
ICT Network Engineer Level 6	FIT		€12,500		
ICT Software Developer Level 6	FIT		€12,500		
Butcher Level 5	Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim ETB		€95,000		
Commis Chef Level 6	Kerry ETB		€40,000		
Chef de Partie Level 8					
Sous Chef Level 8					
Executive Chef Level 9	Tralee Institute of Technology		€45,000		
Engineering Services Management Level 7	Cork Institute of Technology		€25,000		
Manufacturing ICT Engineer-Level 7	Limerick Institute of Technology		€50,000		
Property Services Professional Level 5	Ballsbridge College		€4,000		
Retail Practice Level 5	Retail Ireland Skillnet		€72,000		
International Financial Services Level 9	National College of Ireland		€48,333		

Apprenticeship Data

444. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices estimated to be enrolled in each of the years 2017 to 2021 inclusive of existing and estimated new registrations. [26754/17]

449. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has set a target for the number of female participants to be enrolled in apprenticeships in each of the

years 2017 to 2020. [26759/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 444 and 449 together.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to target apprenticeship registrations in the period 2017 to 2020 is set out in the attached table. It should be noted that SOLAS do not currently have forecast registrations beyond 2020.

The Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship & Traineeship 2016-2020 sets out annual target apprenticeship registrations in the period to 2020. The Plan does not set registration targets for female apprentices. However, as the Deputy is aware, the Apprenticeship Council is currently overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into new areas of the economy. Many of the new programmes currently being developed are in sectors where there is a greater gender balance in the workplace and through this expansion programme we will see an increase in female participation rates. We have already seen evidence of this with almost 40% of participants in the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship, launched last year, being female. However, female participation in the craft trades also needs to be examined and a review of pathways to apprenticeship, including female participation, will commence later this year.

Craft- based apprenticeships	2017	2018	2019	2020
Forecast new registrations per annum	4,147	4,697	5,087	5,587
New apprenticeships				
Planned new registrations per annum	800	1,500	2,297	3,413
Total target apprenticeship registration p.a.	4,947	6,197	7,384	9,000

Question No. 445 answered with Question No. 443.

Apprenticeship Data

446. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the apprenticeship programmes on which the State pays a training allowance; the number of apprentices that receive this payment; and the amount it costs the State per annum. [26756/17]

447. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the cost per apprentice per annum is due to fall as a result of the State no longer paying a training allowance to apprentices in programmes after 2016; and if so, the amount of the revised estimated cost per apprentice per annum. [26757/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 446 and 447 together.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the apprenticeship programmes that receive a training allowance is set out in the following table. The payment of allowances will continue to be paid to apprentices who undertake one of the existing craft trades. A list of those trades is attached. There are no plans to remove this allowance but no allowances are being paid for any of the new apprenticeships in operation or being developed.

The amount of the training allowance is determined by a number of variables including which of the 5 families of trades the employer is designated to (construction, motor, electrical, engineering or print), which of the 3 off-the-job training phases the apprentice is undertaking and how long the apprentice has been registered. SOLAS estimates that the cost of training allowances in 2016 to be €25.9m and is based on 5,849 apprentices undertaking their off-the-job training phases in that year. As apprentice registrations continue to increase for the existing craft apprenticeships, additional funds will be required to fund training allowances over the coming years.

It is estimated that the cost of training an apprentice in one of the existing craft apprenticeships is approximately €6,700 per annum while the estimated cost of training an apprentice in one of the new apprenticeships is approximately €6,300 per annum. This figure may be subject to further refinement as greater numbers of new apprenticeships come into operation.

Based on the targets set out in the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship 2016-2020, it is estimated that the cost of apprenticeship provision in 2020 will rise over the coming years to approximately €200m.

Craft Apprenticeships

Agricultural Mechanics
Aircraft Mechanics
Brick & Stonelaying
Carpentry & Joinery
Construction Plant Fitting
Electrical
Electrical Instrumentation
Electronic Security Systems
Farriery
Floor & Wall Tiling
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics
Industrial Insulation
Instrumentation
Mechanical Automation & Maintenance Fitting
Metal Fabrication
Motor Mechanics
Painting & Decorating
Pipefitting
Plastering
Plumbing
Print Media
Refrigeration & Air Conditioning
Stonecutting & Stonemasonry
Sheet Metalworking
Toolmaking
Vehicle Body Repairs
Wood Manufacturing & Finishing

Apprenticeship Data

448. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 303 of 2 May 2017, if he will provide a breakdown of the figure of

€6,500 per annum. [26758/17]

450. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to parliamentary question numbers 303 of 2 May 2017 and 118 of 10 May 2017, the reason for the discrepancy in the figures of €6,500 and €6,700 provided regarding the cost of an apprentice per annum. [26760/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 448 and 450 together.

It is estimated that the cost of training an apprentice in one of the existing craft apprenticeships is approximately €6,700 per annum while the estimated cost of training an apprentice in one of the new apprenticeships is approximately €6,300 per annum.

The figure of €6,500 per annum quoted in question 303 of the 2 May is an average of both these figures. This figure may be subject to further refinement as greater numbers of new apprenticeships come into operation.

Question No. 449 answered with Question No. 444.

Question No. 450 answered with Question No. 448.

Question No. 451 answered with Question No. 420.

School Staff Appeals Mechanism

452. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an appeal by a school (details supplied) will be upheld in view of the negative impact losing a member of staff will have in the long term on this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26771/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its June meeting under the Small Schools criteria. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post for the 2017/18 school year. The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Education Schemes

453. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a copy of an educational certificate for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26772/17]

454. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide documentation from a State funded third level institution for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26773/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 453 and 454 together.

During the 1970's apprentices were subject to a time served system. Apprentices could attend off-the-job training in the Regional Training Colleges and undertake the Department of Education's Junior and Senior Trade assessments. However, these competency assessments were not mandatory and the National Training Authority, AnCO, was not required to maintain a record of Junior and Senior Trade examination results. I will arrange for enquires to be made with the State Examinations Commission and the relevant Institute of Technology who may have the assessment records and I will revert to the Deputy on the matter.

It is important to note that success in the Junior and Senior Trade assessments does not imply the individual was registered as an apprentice or that an apprentice had completed their apprenticeship. SOLAS currently issues 'Records of Attainment' to time-served apprentices in recognition of having completed a time-served apprenticeship. The individual concerned may wish to contact his local Education and Training Board who are best placed to assist him with an application for a Record of Attainment.

Training Support Grant

455. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be given a training allowance for the duration of a course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26780/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): This is an operational matter for Kerry Education and Training Board (ETB) who are responsible for determining the training allowance by reference to the person's social welfare entitlement and the programme being undertaken. I have asked Kerry ETB to contact the Deputy directly in relation to this matter.

Home Tuition Scheme Provision

456. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the home tuition section of his Department will provide home tuition to a person (details supplied) until their leaving certificate examinations in English, French and Irish are completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26794/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department operates a number of home tuition grant schemes, including a scheme for children, other than those with special education needs, who do not have a school place, are without the offer of a school place and for whom a school place is being actively sought. This scheme is available to children who are between the age of 6 and 16 years. A child who is over 16 but has not completed 3 years of post-primary education, may also qualify for this grant scheme. A student over 18 years does not qualify for this grant scheme.

For those who qualify for this home tuition grant scheme, sanction is given to approve a grant to engage a tutor to provide up to 9 hours home tuition per week for the child in question.

Tuition can only take place during school terms.

Application forms are available from the local Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) of the Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency. The EWO can be contacted at the following address: Educational Welfare Service of Child and Family Agency, Ground Floor, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Dublin 8, phone 01-7718815.

Higher Education Institutions

457. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to put in place an independent inquiry into the governance at universities here further to a television programme (details supplied); his plans to carry out a due diligence review of the purchase by a university purchase of an institute (details supplied) in respect of commercial academic and pension related issues; if he has or plans to intervene in the purchase of the institute by the university in view of the fact that its payment of over €20 million is excessive; his plans for a full review of the higher education authority role in view of its inability to effect a culture of good governance at universities here as shown on the television programme; if he has sought or plans to seek reports from his appointees to the governing authorities of the universities named by the programme regarding their knowledge of poor governance and or their role as governors in enabling poor practice; and his plans to intervene at the university in view of the fact that it has and continues to be involved in the payment of excessive legal fees in cases against its own staff. [26796/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department of Education and Skills and the HEA have been working closely together to strengthen governance arrangements in the higher education sector in recent years.

During 2015, the HEA reviewed its approach to the oversight and governance of higher education institutions and built on existing governance and accountability infrastructure with improved and more transparent mechanisms. This included:

- more comprehensive annual governance reporting requirements,
- the introduction of signed financial memoranda between the HEA and HEIs setting out respective responsibilities,
- new guidelines on timeliness of reporting,
- regular reporting and liaison with the Office of the C&AG and
- a new accountability and risk mechanisms in place with the Department of Education and Skills.

This culminated in the establishment and communication of a new Governance Framework for the Higher Education System, which is available on the HEA website. The framework makes clear the current governance arrangements that are in place and clearly details the responsibilities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in this area.

In addition, a new programme of rolling reviews has been established to cover specific elements of governance. My Department agreed with the HEA that the first rolling review of governance compliance would be on procurement. This review was undertaken in 2016. It has been agreed that the next rolling review will be carried out on non-compliance of payments, including any payments to staff at higher education institutions. The process of tendering for

this review is currently underway in the HEA.

In relation to the purchase of a specific institute referred to by the Deputy, it is important to note that universities are autonomous institutions within the meaning of the Universities Act 1997 and the management of their functions are matters for individual institutions in the first instance. The Minister for Education and Skills has no function in relation to the purchase by the University of the Institute referred to by the Deputy. However, the University has provided assurances to the HEA that there are no implications for current or future state pension liabilities as a result of the acquisition.

In relation to other specific university issues raised in the recent programme, my Department and the HEA have established an independent review of the governance, HR and financial practices within the University of Limerick. This review will be completed by end September.

The HEA has also recently announced a rolling governance review of Intellectual Property policy implementation across HEIs.

My Department of Education and Skills and the HEA are considering whether any additional measures may be necessary to further strengthen governance in the future.

Schools Building Projects Status

458. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the application for funding for a new school building by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26839/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department met with the school referred to in the context of an application received for a replacement school. The school were advised that, due to the need to prioritise available funding towards the provision of essential classroom accommodation to meet demographic demand, it would not be possible to progress a major project for the school at this time.

The school were also advised that my Department would work with the school, as far as practicable and subject to the availability of funding, to further improve the school's facilities. In that regard, should enrolment numbers justify the appointment of an additional mainstream teacher, and if it was not possible to accommodate such a teacher within the school, the school could submit an application to my Department for an additional classroom at that point.

Schools Building Projects Status

459. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the delay to the completion of the final phase of a secondary school (details supplied); the reason this project has not been delivered on time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26852/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project referred to by the Deputy was authorised to proceed to tender in October 2016.

However, as the pre-qualification of contractors had first been conducted by the design team in April 2015 the design team, concerned about the possibility of legal challenges, asked the Office of Government Procurement for advice on this matter. The advice was that it would be prudent to run the pre-qualification again.

The Design Team has rerun the pre-qualification and the project is now out to tender. Tenders are due back in mid July.

Subject to no issues arising it is anticipated that construction will commence in late 2017 and the project is scheduled to take approximately 18 months to complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

460. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding progress on a new school building project for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26866/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the building project for the school in question is included on my Department's capital programme.

Officials in my Department have been liaising with officials in the relevant Local Authority regarding the potential development of an educationally zoned site to accommodate the school. There are currently infrastructural issues which need to be resolved in order to progress the proposed development.

My officials have contacted the school patron to discuss the issues with a view to progressing matters.

Brexit Negotiations

461. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26901/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

The key issues identified in my Department's extensive consultations and analysis are Brexit's likely impact on the future of the Common Travel Area and its implications for students, teachers, academic staff and researchers, the possible impact on mutual recognition of qualifications, UK/Ireland research collaboration and partnerships between education institutions and

enterprise as well as the implications for EU funding for research and the impact on EU funding programmes such as Horizon2020, PEACE IV and Erasmus+.

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

Irish Language

462. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce changes to the second level Irish language syllabus to increase its relevance in every day society in non-Gaeltacht areas. [26916/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the context of the new Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and as set out in my Department's Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, two new subject specifications for Junior Cycle Irish (Language 1 (L1) and Language 2 (L2)) are to be implemented for first-year students in post-primary schools from September 2017.

This is the first time, in the history of post-primary education in Ireland, that separate Irish specifications have been developed for differing school and student contexts.

The L1 specification will be delivered in schools where Irish is the language of schooling and, in relation to non-Gaeltacht areas, seeks to further develop the competence of students attending Gaelcholáistí and Aonaid LánGhaeilge.

The L2 specification caters for students in schools where English is the language of schooling and it too seeks to build on prior learning achieved during their primary education.

Both specifications focus on the provision of learning experiences that relate to students' lives and they also seek to provide frequent opportunities for authentic engagement and interaction by students with the language and with those who use it regularly.

At senior cycle, the Leaving Certificate Irish syllabus (updated in 2012) explicitly states as one of its aims that 'students will experience Irish as a communicative language that is relevant to the contemporary world'. Topics listed in this syllabus include the culture of youth, the environment, healthy living, as well as challenges facing Ireland. Thus, through their study of the language, students use Irish to engage with everyday societal issues, be they local, national or international.

The need to provide for differentiated specifications at senior cycle is recognised by my Department and, as part of the Gaeltacht Education Policy, "work is expected to commence on the development of differentiated L1 and L2 specifications for senior cycle Irish once the differentiated specifications for Irish at junior cycle have been developed and are working well in schools." (Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2016)

The decision to provide two differentiated specifications for junior cycle, and the proposed continuation of this approach into senior cycle, was taken following extensive consultation with stakeholders. During more recent consultations, feedback on this new direction in curricular provision for Irish at post-primary level has been very positive particularly in that they:

(a) place the student and the student's Irish language learning needs at the core of the learning experience and environment, and

(b) afford teachers the professional autonomy to make decisions about how and what their students will experience as language learners in the Irish language classroom.

Schools Building Projects Status

463. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the development of a new school for a school (details supplied) can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26921/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme 2016-21.

The school and its design team submitted their Stage 2(b) report for this major building project to my Department on 24th April and the submission is currently under review. Following receipt of that submission my Department has authorised the Board of Management to instruct its Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process for the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered.

On completion of the review of the Stage 2(b) submission my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression to tender and construction stages at that time.

Labour Court Recommendations

464. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expected timeframe for approval of University College Cork's request of 4 April 2017 for sanctioning in respect of the binding Labour Court Recommendation LCR21419; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26923/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that on 30 May my Department, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, conveyed sanction to University College Cork to implement the Labour Court recommendation with effect from the 12 September 2016.

Public Sector Pensions Data

465. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26970/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I will arrange for the information requested by the Deputy in relation to teachers and non teaching staff paid on payrolls operated by my Department to be forwarded directly to her.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

466. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the rejection of a wheelchair lift in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [26986/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2016, the school to which the Deputy refers applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme for a range of Access for All works for its building. This included the provision of a lift.

My Department provided funding to the school for a variety of measures excluding the lift because the school already has one.

My Department notes that in one of the Reports accompanying the application, the Occupational Therapist advised the school that, in order to avoid the pupil travelling unnecessarily long distances, it would need to consider its timetable to use alternative suitable classrooms nearby. My Department concurs with this approach, which would apply equally to use of the classrooms closest to the existing lift. In this way, Access for All can be managed both by the provision that my Department can make and by practical local solutions. This approach also allows my Department to provide the limited Access for All funding available to the greatest number of schools possible.

Schools Refurbishment

467. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a project on a school (details supplied) will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26992/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has engaged consultants to procure the works required for the school in question and has emphasised the urgency in getting the works done as soon as possible. My officials are liaising with the school on the matter to keep them up to date on progress.

State Examinations Fee Exemptions

468. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will direct his Department to refund parents on low incomes with dependent children who could not avail of the State examination fee waiver for medical card holders (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27009/17]

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.

Ireland Scholarship Programme

469. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will direct his Department to include a person (details supplied) in County Sligo who is dependent on their parents who are medical cardholders as a candidate for the 2017 all-Ireland third level scholarship scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27010/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Students who sit the Leaving Certificate Examination for the first time in 2017 and who obtain at least Grade O6 or a higher grade in at least five subjects from the approved list of subjects, (as set out in the Rules and Programme for Post Primary Schools) will automatically be included as candidates for the award of the All Ireland Scholarships.

In order to be eligible for the All Ireland Scholarship, a student must have attended a non fee-paying DES recognised school and participated in a Leaving Certificate programme at that school. In addition, each individual candidate must be recognised as being from a socio-economically less advantaged background and, as evidence of this, must have been exempted from the payment of the Leaving Certificate examination fee.

Exemption from payment of the Leaving Certificate fee must have been communicated to the State Examinations Commission before the issue of the Leaving Certificate results (August 16th 2017), and medical cards must be valid on the date when fees are due to be paid to the State Examinations Commission (in 2017 this was the 31 March). Furthermore, the candidate should not be a holder of another scholarship.

The initial identification of potential scholarship recipients will be made on the basis of Leaving Certificate results.

Schools Building Projects Data

470. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new schools required and-or extensions to existing schools contemplated over the next five years (details supplied); the number and location of schools currently under construction, at planning stage or otherwise anticipated; the degree to which all the necessary preparations are in hand to meet the emerging requirements with particular reference to the local LAPS; if each or all of the anticipated sites have been cleared for development; his views on whether proposals in hand to date are sufficient to meet the requirements in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27011/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's six-year Capital Programme priorities building projects to meet demographic demand and this includes schools in County Kildare. 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.

As the Deputy is aware, there are currently 29 major capital projects being progressed in County Kildare, details of which were provided to the Deputy previously. This is in addition to over 50 smaller scale projects that have been approved devolved funding under my Department's additional accommodation scheme. Details of these projects may be viewed on my Department's website and this is updated regularly.

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.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department consistently monitors demographics to identify where additional schools places will be required. My Department is currently in the process of completing demographic exercises nationwide which includes the areas referred to by the Deputy. This process is detailed and rigorous and will take some time to complete. It is anti-

pated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

Schools Refurbishment

471. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the rejection of a wheelchair lift in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27012/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2016, the school to which the Deputy refers applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme for a range of Access for All works for its building. This included the provision of a lift.

My Department provided funding to the school for a variety of measures excluding the lift because the school already has one.

My Department notes that in one of the Reports accompanying the application, the Occupational Therapist advised the school that, in order to avoid the pupil travelling unnecessarily long distances, it would need to consider its timetable to use alternative suitable classrooms nearby. My Department concurs with this approach, which would apply equally to use of the classrooms closest to the existing lift. In this way, Access for All can be managed both by the provision that my Department can make and by practical local solutions. This approach also allows my Department to provide the limited Access for All funding available to the greatest number of schools possible.

School Costs

472. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is financial assistance available for families to meet the costs involved in circumstances in which their child's school uses tablet devices (details supplied) instead of books; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27013/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to use tablet devices is a matter for the Board of Management of each school. Where the introduction of new technology is planned, there should be consultation with members of the school community including parents. The cost and other implications should be fully considered by the Boards of Managements before a decision is made. It is a matter for each individual school to determine the curriculum to be taught and the strategies to be employed to support teaching and learning in their school.

As part of the new Digital Strategy for Schools, my Department provides advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools that are best-suited to support learning and teaching in schools. An advice sheet on the adoption of tablets in schools is available on the PDST-Technology in Education (PDST-TIE) website, detailing what tablets can offer a school, educational considerations, purchasing considerations and software.

€210m will be allocated over the period of the Strategy, with the first tranche of €30m already distributed to schools in respect of the 2016-2017 school year. Work on the implementation of the Strategy is now underway.

There is a School Books Grant Scheme in place that provides assistance for books including ebooks for students in all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the Free Education

Scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provided approx. €7 million in funding to primary schools in 2016.

There is no specific financial assistance to provide funding to address the scenario outlined by the Deputy, outside of the standard funding allocated to schools, and both the School Books Grant Scheme and the ICT Infrastructure funding referred to above.

Special Educational Needs

473. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a place in a language unit in County Kilkenny for a person (details supplied) in south Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27042/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs should be included, where possible and appropriate, in mainstream school placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational needs require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

The provision of special classes for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) is one of an extensive range of supports provided by the Department. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including applications to establish special classes for SSLD. Applications meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the NCSE. The opening of a Speech and Language class is, however, contingent on the Health Service Executive (HSE) being in a position to provide Speech and Language therapy to the students in the class.

The enrolment of pupils in an SSLD special classes is managed locally by an Admissions & Discharges Committee, comprising the Speech and Language Therapy Manager, Speech and Language Therapist, Class Teacher and Principal. The criteria for enrolment in a Special Class for pupils with SSLD is set out in my Department's Circular 0038/2007. A full-time teacher is assigned to each class, and classes operate with a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 7:1. A minimum number of five eligible pupils is required for a school to retain a SSLD class. Eligible pupils may spend up to two years in such classes. An enhanced capitation grant is provided to schools operating special classes for pupils with SSLD. 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 who are not enrolled in a special class for SSLD and who meet the criteria for SSLD, as outlined in my Department's Circular, may qualify for additional teaching support where he/she is enrolled in mainstream school. At present, pupils with mild speech and language difficulties may qualify for supplementary teaching support from within the school's general allocation of learning support/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.

A new model for allocating Teaching Resources to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, as recommended by the NCSE, will be implemented with effect from September 2017. The revised allocation model replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational

needs, and the NCSE allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities. Allocations of special education teaching resources issued for all schools in March 2017. My Department's Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools, which was published on 7th March 2017, sets out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools. Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers have also been published.

The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability.

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 the present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties and early intervention.

As Speech and Language Therapists are currently employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE), 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.

Special Educational Needs

474. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the levels of training provided for teachers of children with ASD that are in mainstream classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27043/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Special Education Support Service (SESS), which provides training for schools in how to assist pupils with special educational needs, including children with ASD, transferred to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on 20th March 2017.

The SESS comes under the auspices of the NCSE's Regional Support Service which was established to provide an integrated and coherent service to assist schools in supporting children with special education needs.

As the question to which the Deputy refers relates to the NCSE's Regional Support Service, the matter has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

Schools Healthy Living Strategies

475. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that offer the wellbeing programme for the junior cycle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27044/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015, the Wellbeing area of learning will be introduced in September 2017 and

will be recorded on the new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement in Autumn 2020. The Wellbeing area of learning will be compulsory in all schools.

School Curriculum

476. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that offer alternatives such as philosophy classes when children are withdrawn from religion classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27045/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Constitution and in accordance with the Education Act 1998, parents have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes. It is expected that this right will be upheld by schools on foot of a parental request.

The nature of the arrangements put in place by a school to ensure this right is upheld is a matter for each individual school. Accordingly, my Department does not hold information in relation to same.

However, the Deputy will be aware that the forthcoming Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill 2016 includes a specific requirement that a school's enrolment policy must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction. I believe this is an important measure which will help ensure transparency from the outset as to how a school will uphold the rights of parents in this regard.

Education and Training Provision

477. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of places available on the momentum programme; the full year cost of increasing places on the programme by 20%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27068/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): SOLAS inform me that the average cost of training a participant on the Momentum programme is approximately €3,200 per annum. The planned intake for the second round of Momentum was 6,000. Based on that figure the cost of increasing the number of places on the Momentum programme by 20% would be €3.84m.

Given the overall improvement in the economic position, the welcome decline in the numbers who are unemployed and the consequent reduction in demand for training, there are no current plans for a further round of the Momentum programme and participants are not currently being recruited.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

478. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied) into the operation and organisation of QQI; his views on the serious findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27080/17]

479. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to implement the findings of a report (details supplied) into the operation and organisation of QQI; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27081/17]

480. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficult industrial relations environment in QQI; his department's role in the resolution of the causes of this difficult environment as described in a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27082/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): An independent external review of the current organisational structure of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was completed by Clarion Consulting Ltd in December 2016. The purpose of the review was to identify a more appropriate staffing structure that will enable QQI to fulfill its statutory responsibilities and to communicate effectively both internally and externally.

My Department is committed to working with QQI to progress the significant and important recommendations contained in the review.

A Steering Committee, comprised of representation from my Department, QQI's Executive and QQI's Board, has been established to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the change management process within QQI. The services of an independent change management expert are currently being procured to assist QQI in embedding the necessary features to support the implementation of the recommendations arising from the review.

The Steering Group and appointment of the change management expert will ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place for communication and active engagement on change and progress with QQI staff and management.

Question No. 479 answered with Question No. 478.

Question No. 480 answered with Question No. 478.

International Programmes

481. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contribution that Ireland has made to UNESCO's international programme for the development of communication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27112/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland does not make any direct payment to the International Programme for the Development of Communication. The Department of Education and Skills, does however pay Ireland's annual membership contribution to UNESCO, which amounted to €1,013,541 in 2017.

School Accommodation

482. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he expects to carry out the necessary assessment of a school (details supplied) to determine if the prefabs need to be replaced in line with the school's recent application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27121/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, it is my intention in accordance with the Programme for Government to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established, over the lifetime of my Department's capital programme (2016-2021). To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether individual prefabs need

to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

It is intended that this assessment, when finalised, will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019. A funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 for this initiative in the programme.

School Accommodation

483. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for an additional classroom by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27122/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has approved a mainstream classroom for the school in question and construction is nearing completion. This classroom will provide accommodation for the additional class teacher due to be appointed in September 2017.

Psychological Services

484. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) can be placed on a waiting list. [27124/17]

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

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

Where parents have specific concerns in relation to the educational development of their child it is advised that they raise them, in the first instance, with the principal of the school concerned with a view to that principal discussing the appropriateness or otherwise of an educational assessment with the school’s assigned NEPS psychologist.

Equal Opportunities Employment

485. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27135/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Disability Act 2005 requires public bodies to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities and to achieve a target of 3% of staff with disabilities. It also provides a framework for monitoring the employment target through monitoring committees in Government Departments. The role of the monitoring committees is to monitor and, in consultation with the National Disability Authority (NDA), encourage compliance with the Act by all public bodies under its aegis. In this Department in 2016 the percentage of employees with a disability under the definition in the Disability Act 2005 is 3.94%.

Under relevant legislation, aegis bodies of my Department are required to provide my Department's Monitoring Committee with data on the number of people with disabilities employed in respect of the preceding year for inclusion in an overall report to NDA. The purpose of the report is to analyse the implementation of Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 Section 47 and to facilitate the evaluation of compliance by the NDA and the Monitoring Committee, for bodies who have not met the 3% target.

Of the eighteen bodies required to report under the legislation, thirteen have reported 3% or higher of their staff as having a disability and overall compliance was up from 3.8% in 2015 to 4% in 2016.

Under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, which was published in 2015, the Government committed to progressively increasing the public service employment target from 3% towards 6% by 2024. Special public service competitions for people with disabilities will be arranged and will open up alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities. The Department and its agencies will work to achieve the new targets in the coming years.

School Funding

486. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to deal with the capital shortfall relating to a school (details supplied) in Kildare north. [27148/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has received correspondence from the school in question relating to the matter to which he refers. My Department will be in further contact with the school when the correspondence has been considered.

Cóiríocht Scoile

487. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an ndéanfaidh an Roinn teagmháil dhíreach le bord bainistíochta scoile i gcontae Dhún na nGall (sonraí curtha ar fáil) d'fhonn teacht ar réiteach atá inghlactha i gcoitinne ar an easpa spáis atá sa chlós

scoile; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [27154/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is féidir liom a dheimhniú don Teachta nach bhfuair mo Roinn aon chumarsáid ón scoil a dtagraítear di maidir le ceisteanna a bhaineann lena gclós scoile.

Tá sé de rogha ag údaráis na scoile teagmháil dhíreach a dhéanamh le hAonad Pleanála agus Tógála mo Roinne chun ceisteanna den sórt sin a phlé agus treoir a lorg maidir le hiarratas chuí a dhéanamh ar mhaoiniú, nuair is gá sin.

Departmental Correspondence

488. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27165/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that officials in my Department are currently examining the issues raised in this case and a reply will issue shortly.

Psychological Services

489. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of NEPS assessments that have been carried out per school in 2016 and to date in 2017; the maximum number of NEPS assessments permitted per school per year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27186/17]

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

NEPS does not set maxima in relation to assessments or direct input in relation to individual pupils allowable to schools per se but in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

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

I set out below for the Deputies information an average per school of individual student referrals undertaken by NEPS psychologists during 2016 and to date in 2017. Additionally I include similar data for SCPA assessments commissioned in these periods.

I would however caution that the NEPS referral data is not complete as many NEPS referrals for the 2016/17 academic year will not be uploaded to the database until the upcoming summer recess and that similarly the count for SCPA assessments for 2017 is based on those to date submitted for payment by the SCPA panelist rather than the count of assessments undertaken to date.

I can inform the Deputy that 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 psychologists 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.

Average Number of individual pupil Referrals/Assessments per school in 2016 and 2017

-	2016	2017 (*)
Average number per school of Individual Pupil Referrals undertaken by NEPS psychologists	2.6	1.7
Average number per school of SCPA Assessments paid for by NEPS	2.1	2

School Excellence Fund

490. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the objectives and modus operandi of the schools excellence fund as described in the response to Parliamentary Question No. 155 of 3 May 2017 appears to be identical to those of the school completion programme which budget has been decimated since 2012 and which the ESRI review report of the programme identified very significant effects of budget reductions on targeted interventions such as the provision of summer programmes for at risk children; and the rationale for cutting the school completion programme while introducing another funding programme with the same objectives and same modus operandi of the SCP. [27194/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the School Completion Programme and the School Excellence Fund are two entirely separate interventions and, while both form part of DEIS Plan 2017, they focus on different objectives.

The **School Completion Programme (SCP)** is a service for schools in the context of DEIS the core aim of which is to increase the numbers of young people staying in school and in doing so improve the numbers of pupils who successfully complete Senior Cycle, or equivalent. The SCP, including its funding, comes within the policy remit of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Further information on the SCP is available on the website of the Programme's service provider, Tusla, at the following link: <http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/school-support-services-under-the-deis-initiative/school-completion-programme>.

A key element of DEIS Plan 2017 is its focus on a pilot approach to identifying and supporting effective interventions, and exploring how these and further creativity around teaching and learning can make better use of the resources available to schools to achieve good educational outcomes.

To make this happen, DEIS Plan 2017 sets out the arrangements for the establishment of a **School Excellence Fund** to encourage schools to adopt more creative and innovative approaches to tackling educational disadvantage.

It is intended that the Fund will be trialled in a first group of schools during the coming school year, with priority being given to proposals from schools serving the most disadvantaged communities in inner city areas.

Areas of activity to be considered for piloting include:

- Encouraging strategic clustering and networking of schools in acutely disadvantaged areas;
- Leveraging evidence informed good practice in meeting the needs of students at risk of educational disadvantage;
- Enhancing school leadership and better equipping teachers to meet the needs of their pupils;
- Improving parental engagement and participation in student learning
- Supporting transitions across the education continuum.

Implementation of the SEF will be overseen by the Inspectorate and Social Inclusion Unit of my Department and evaluation will take place as part of the DEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

The establishment of the School Excellence Fund fulfills an important Programme for Government commitment aimed at promoting excellence and innovation in the school system.

School Transport Administration

491. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will clarify the position going forward surrounding escorts on school buses for special needs pupils; if he will maintain the present escort system in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27225/17]

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.

Under the terms of my Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, children are eligible for transport where they are attending the nearest recognised school that is or can be resourced to meet their special educational needs.

Under the terms of this Scheme, the Department also provides funding to schools for the

employment of escorts to accompany children with special educational needs whose care and safety needs require this level of support while they travel to and from school.

Applications for transport provision, under the terms of the Scheme, should only be completed in circumstances where children are not in a position to avail of standard school transport services.

Parents may apply for standard school transport services for their children, however, escorts are not a feature of mainstream school transport provision.

Department officials are liaising with the family and Bus Éireann in relation to the school transport provision for the children in question.

Third Level Funding

492. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the €600 million base funding requirement in higher education institutions by 2021 identified by the Cassells report includes the €124 million that has been set aside from the calculation of the fiscal space for demographic increases in third level in 2018 and 2019. [27229/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The core funding figure for higher education of an additional €600 million annually by 2021 is recommended in the report of the Expert Group on Future Funding For Higher Education. This level of funding is required in order to deliver higher quality outcomes and to provide for increased demographics, with the funding for increased demographics understood to be of the order of €160m.

Following the publication of the Expert Group's report, I took immediate steps to increase funding for higher education to address, inter alia, rising demographics, with an additional €36.5 million being secured in 2017. Provision is also being made in the Department's expenditure ceiling in 2018 and 2019 for further investment and, cumulatively, in the period 2017 – 2019 this represents an additional €160 million Exchequer investment in higher education. Elements of this multi-annual funding provision will continue to be directed at meeting the costs of demographic increases.

National Training Fund

493. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the surplus of the national training fund cannot be used for capital expenditure at higher education institutions. [27230/17]

494. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the expenditure allocation for the national training fund is determined; and if its expenditure envelope can increase with growing revenues. [27231/17]

528. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the proposed employer-employee contribution mechanism was established within the NTF; and if some of the surplus in the investment account can be utilised for funding higher education institutions. [27749/17]

529. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the surplus or deficit for the year, the surplus brought forward by 1 January and the surplus carried forward at 31 December in relation to the income and expenditure account of the national training fund in

each of the years 2000 to 2016, in tabular form. [27750/17]

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

I propose to take Questions Nos. 493, 494, 528 and 529 together.

The National Training Fund Act, 2000 provides for a levy on employers to be used to give skills or to raise skills amongst those in, or seeking, employment.

The levy is 0.7% of reckonable earnings in respect of employees in Class A and Class H employments, which represents approximately 75% of all insured employees. The levy is collected through the PAYE/PRSI system and funds are transferred monthly to my Department by the Department of Social Protection.

Funding from the NTF is allocated by my Department with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in accordance with the provisions of the National Training Fund Act, 2000.

Section 7 of the National Training Fund Act, 2000 provides that payments may be made from the Fund in respect of schemes, which are established to:

- (a) raise the skills of those in employment;
- (b) provide training to those who wish to acquire skills to take up employment; or
- (c) provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.

While the NTF does not form part of the Vote of my Department, the allocation for each scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process. The NTF is included as an annex to the published Estimates and such funding is included in the overall expenditure ceiling for my Department since 2011.

The operation of the EU Fiscal Rules and the inclusion of the NTF in my Department's overall annual expenditure ceiling mean that, in the absence of an increased rate of contribution, additional expenditure cannot be sourced from the NTF without a corresponding drop in Exchequer expenditure.

Income from the NTF levy had fallen from a high of €413 million in 2008 to €299 million in 2012. The accumulated surplus in the fund has been critical in maintaining expenditure levels, particularly in the provision of training for the unemployed, in a period when receipts were falling.

It is considered prudent to continue to maintain an adequate surplus in the Fund to meet demand in future years and while the surplus represents a very significant sum, it would only cover 7 months NTF expenditure at current levels. The attached table sets out the surplus in the fund during the years 2000 to 2016. The surplus remains available for investment in education and training programmes to meet skills needs.

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

My Department, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, have been under-

taking a public consultation process on a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for the higher and further education sectors. The mechanism, which estimates an increase in the National Training Fund levy from 0.7% to 1% between 2018 and 2020, could yield an additional €200m revenue in 2020. As this would be an increase in discretionary revenue, the additional funds could be spent for the purposes outlined in the NTF Act.

National Training Fund Surplus 2000 – 2016

National Training Fund	Balance brought forward on 1 January €000	Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year €000	Surplus Carried forward 31 December €000
2001	0	31,279	31,279
2002	31,279	36,239	67,518
2003	67,518	18,061	85,579
2004	85,579	(1,484)	84,095
2005	84,095	16,861	100,956
2006	100,956	21,184	122,140
2007	122,140	38,710	160,850
2008	160,850	20,313	181,163
2009	181,163	8,061	189,224
2010	189,224	(85,034)	104,190
2011	104,190	73,833	178,023
2012	178,023	(23,019)	155,004
2013	155,004	742	155,746
2014	155,746	(7,921)	147,825
2015	147,825	35,937	183,762
2016	183,762	54,433	238,195

Please note that the NTF was established in 2000.

The 2001 accounts cover the period 21st December 2000 to 31st December 2001 inclusive.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

495. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on making certain courses in a college (details supplied) eligible for the free fees scheme to increase persons' employment prospects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27237/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Private colleges operating on a for-profit basis, as is the case with Griffith College, are not listed as approved institutions under the free fees initiative scheme.

However, tax relief on tuition fees may be available for students attending courses in private colleges. Details in relation to this relief are available from the Revenue Commissioners.

It is also open to profit making private institutions to provide financial supports to students that they consider to be in need of such assistance.

School Staff

496. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue regarding an additional teaching post appeal in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27263/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its April meeting under the alleviating some of the pressure on class sizes at infants level criteria. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post for the 2017/18 school year. The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

School Staff

497. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue regarding an additional teaching post appeal in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27264/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its June meeting under the alleviating some of the pressure on class sizes at infants level criteria. The appeal was refused by the Appeals Board on the basis that the grounds of the appeal did not warrant the allocation of an additional post for the 2017/18 school year. The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Special Educational Needs Staff

498. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue regarding an appeal of a special education teaching allocation in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27265/17]

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, including the school to which the Deputy has referred, will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

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

The additional funding will provide 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.

Schools who wished to submit an appeal were asked to do so by March 31st 2017.

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

The NCSE will advise schools of the outcome of appeals by the end of June, however, the NCSE has advised that the school referred to by the Deputy in this question has not submitted an appeal under the NCSE process.

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

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs have also now been published and are available on my Department's 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.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

499. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to extend the existing July provision scheme with the view to implementing recommendations from various stakeholders concerning the need to extend the programme to include children with Down syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27268/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to examine the adequacy of current special education access and funding provision.

In addition the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders was published in July 2016.

In developing this policy advice, the NCSE reviewed the Department's July Provision scheme. The NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research. The Policy advice is available on the NCSE's website www.ncse.ie

The policy advice recommends that relevant stakeholders should discuss the development of a national, day activity scheme that provides a structured, safe, social environment for all students with complex special educational needs for one month of the summer holidays.

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

My officials will engage with officials in the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Health and other relevant stakeholders in regard to implementing the recommendations in relation to July Provision.

I have no plans to extend the existing July Provision Scheme while this process is ongoing.

Departmental Schemes

500. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of incidences whereby parents of children with Down syndrome and/or individual schools were contacted by his Department to issue a warning of possible legal action and/or possible recoupment as a result of funding via the July provision scheme having been sanctioned and provided for a child with the condition previously only for his Department to later determine that the

child was in fact ineligible for same as per existing criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27269/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's July Education Programme (or July Provision Grant Scheme) provides funding towards an extended school year for children with a severe or profound general learning disability and/or children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) enrolled in recognised schools.

My Department has not changed the qualifying criteria for access to the July Provision scheme and has not issued any warning of possible legal action or possible recoupment in respect of any application where a child was eligible under the terms of the scheme.

Where an application for July Provision is made in respect of a child who is not eligible for such provision the application will be refused. Where an application is approved, based on information provided on the application form which subsequently proves to be inaccurate to a material degree, my Department may consider seeking recoupment of the grant paid.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

501. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna céard iad na socruithe atá i bhfeidhm chun a chinntiú go mbeidh seirbhísí oideachais bunscoile ar fáil sa nGaeltacht trí mheán na Gaeilge do ghasúir as an nGaeltacht a bhfuil an t-uathachas orthu; céard é an fad is faide is ceadmhach a bheith idir áit chónaithe gasúir den sórt sin agus áit a gcuirtear seirbhísí oideachais den sórt sin ar fáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [27270/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Geallann an Roinn seo a chinntiú go mbeidh fáil ag gach leanbh a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais aici nó aige, páistí ar speictream an uathachais san áireamh, ar oideachas atá oiriúnach dá gcuid riachtanas, i suíomhanna scoile de rogha, trí líonra na mbunscoileanna agus n-iar-bhunscoileanna.

Tugann socrúcháin den sórt sin fáil ar chláir oideachais aonair a fhéadann leas a bhaint as idirghabhálacha oiriúnacha oideachais, a chuireann múinteoirí gairmiúla lánoilte ar fáil, le tacú ó Chúntóirí Speisialta Oideachais agus an curaclam cuí scoile.

Is í an Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta, trína líonra d'Eagraithe Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais áitiúla, i gcomhar leis na comhpháirtithe cuí oideachais, atá freagrach as ranganna speisialta a bhunú i gceantair éagsúla tíreolaíocha mar a n-aithnítear riachtanas ar leith.

Is cuid de chontanam an tsoláthair oideachais iad ranganna speisialta agus cuireann siad ar chumas daltaí a bhfuil riachtanais oideachais níos casta acu oideachas a fháil, i ngrúpaí beaga ranga, laistigh de scoileanna príomhshrutha. Oireann na ranganna seo do dhaltaí iad a moltar ina dtuairiscí gairmiúla áit i rang speisialta a thabhairt dóibh.

Sula n-iarrtar ar scoil rang speisialta a bhunú, nó aird a thabhairt ar iarratas ó scoil le haghaidh rang speisialta, ní mór don Eagraí Náisiúnta Oideachais Speisialta a bheith sásta go bhfuil an rang inbhuanaithe agus suite go hoiriúnach ag cur san áireamh an riachtanas atá ann agus an riachtanas a d'fhéadfadh teacht chun cinn sa cheantar. Lena chois sin, cuirfidh an SENO cóiríocht na scoile agus fáil an phobail ar an scoil san áireamh.

Tá os cionn 1,150 rang speisialta i scoileanna príomhshrutha ar fud na tíre faoi láthair agus tá ranganna breise speisialta beartaithe don scoilbhliain seo chugainn.

Tá roinnt ranganna speisialta bunaithe ag an gComhairle i gceantair Ghaeltachta ar fud na tíre. Gheofar liosta iomlán na ranganna speisialta ar shuíomh gréasáin na Comhairle ag www.ncse.ie/special-classes

Ní féidir i gcónaí a chinntiú go mbeidh áit i rang speisialta ar fáil i scoil áitiúil an linbh, ach is féidir le scéim iompair scoile mo Roinne cóir iompair a chur ar fáil do leanaí atá ag freastal ar an scoil aitheanta is gaire mar ar féidir acmhainní a chur ar fáil chun a gcuid riachtanas speisialta oideachais a chomhlíonadh.

Tá Scéim Aitheantais Scoile na Gaeltachta, a seoladh i 2017, bunaithe ar chritéir airithe teanga a chur i ngníomh laistigh de thréimhse cúig bliana. Faoin scéim seo, is í an Ghaeilge a bheidh mar theanga theagaisc i ngach ábhair, seachas Béarla (agus teangacha iasachta in iarbhunscoileanna) sna scoileanna sin atá rannpháirteach sa scéim. Ba chóir d'oideachas Gaeilge den sórt sin soláthar a dhéanamh do riachtanais gach dalta, lena n-áirítear daltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu. Ba chóir do scoileanna a oibríonn trí mheán na Gaeilge tacaíocht bhreise teagaisc a chur ar fáil, más gá, chun tacú le litearthacht leanaí sa Ghaeilge.

Sna scoileanna sa scéim ina gcleachtar an tumoideachas luath (scoileanna nach múintear aon Bhéarla iontu i ranganna na naíonán), ba chóir tacaíochtaí a bheith ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge ar leibhéal na naíonán don Ghaeilge agus don Mhatamaitic, agus trí mheán an Bhéarla don Bhéarla ó rang a haon ar aghaidh.

Meabhraítear do scoileanna gur gá an aird chéanna a thabhairt ar fhorbairt inniúlacht litearthachta na ndaltaí sa Ghaeilge agus sa Bhéarla araon, de réir riachtanais oideachais na ndaltaí, i gcomhthéacs an oideachais Ghaeilge. Ní mór do scoileanna Gaeltachta atá páirteach sa scéim nádúr deacrachtaí leanaí agus riachtanais speisialta oideachais na ndaltaí a chur san áireamh agus idirghabhálacha cuí á roghnú. Mar shampla, i gcás ina bhfuil riachtanas breise oideachais ag leanaí, is féidir an tacaíocht fhorlíontach a chuireann scoileanna ar fáil do na leanaí sin a bheith i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla, nó i meascán den dá theanga, faoi mar a mheasann an scoil a bheith riachtanach chun tacú le foghlaim na leanaí.

Gheofar eolas mionsonraithe ar an Scéim agus paca eolais ar bhuntáistí oideachasúla an tumoideachais chomh maith le sonraí ina dtacaíochtaí breise do scoileanna atá rannpháirteach sa Scéim ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne ag Scéim Aitheantais do Scoileanna Gaeltachta (www.education.ie).

Gheofar i gCiorclán 0013/2017 agus na Treoirínte foilsithe do Bhunscoileanna: tacú le daltaí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais acu i scoileanna príomhshrutha atá forbartha ag an tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Síceolaíochta Oideachais, an Chigireacht agus an Rannán Oideachais Speisialta tuilleadh eolais ar conas is féidir le scoileanna riachtanais foghlama daltaí i scoileanna Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht a aithint agus a chomhlíonadh.

Ministerial Functions

502. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will accept an invitation from a school (details supplied) to visit the school in the near future; the likely timescale that will be involved before the visit takes place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27277/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have indeed received an invitation to visit the school in question and congratulate their staff and students on their recent Yellow Flag award.

Deputy Hildegarde Naughton has also been in contact on the same issue and I have suggested that I will call into the school during my next official visit to Galway, which I hope to schedule as early as possible.

School Transport Eligibility

503. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if provisions can be made to allow a mainstream student travel on the same school transport provided by his Department through the SEN system as a sibling with special needs in cases in which the mainstream student is not attending the nearest school but willing to pay for their ticket and there is space on the bus (details supplied). [27327/17]

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.

Under the terms of the Department's School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs, applications for transport provision should only be completed in circumstances where children are not in a position to avail of standard school transport services.

The Department and Bus Éireann are very conscious of the specialised nature of transport provision for children with special educational needs. This is reflected in the standard of dedicated service provided and the fact that these services are generally planned and timetabled to operate on a door-to-door basis. In certain cases, the Department also provides funding to schools for the employment of escorts to accompany children whose care and safety needs require this level of support while they travel to and from school.

Given the concerns regarding the welfare of these children with special educational needs, it is not practical to make these services available to children who are capable of travelling on standard mainstream school transport services.

Children who are attending mainstream schools may apply for school transport in accordance with the terms of the Department's School Transport Schemes for Primary and Post Primary Schools.

Teachers' Remuneration

504. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is the objective of Government to achieve pay equality for all teachers that started work since 2011 as part of the current public sector pay talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27376/17]

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

starting pay by a further 4-5%. Later in 2011, the Government placed a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

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

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

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the education sector. 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.

Accordingly, the recently concluded draft Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 includes a provision in relation to new entrants which states that an examination of the remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades covered by parties to the Agreement will be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

I also welcome the recent decision taken by the special convention of ASTI members to immediately suspend all industrial action relating to the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) and Junior Certificate reform. As a result of the suspension of industrial action by ASTI members, a number of direct financial advantages will now apply to all teachers (both ASTI members and those teachers who are not members of a trade union) and who were not previously covered by the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA). These include a wide range of measures specifically applying to post-2012 entrant teachers including pay improvements for post 2012 teachers through the immediate payment of the first phase new salary scales agreed under the LRA and the payment of the second phase in January 2018.

Schools Refurbishment

505. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be provided to repair a prefab at a school (details supplied) in County Kerry to accommodate a new autism class; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27408/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application, from the school referred to, for funding for repair works to a prefab in the context of a new ASD class at the school.

The school has recently been advised of the technical recommendation required in respect of their application. Once received, my Department will be in a position to consider the application further.

Higher Education Authority

506. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will request the HEA to undertake a detailed longitudinal survey on graduate career outcomes (details supplied). [27412/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Higher Education Authority's (HEA) first destinations survey has been in place since 1982 and surveys graduates nine months after graduation. This survey is widely recognised to be of benefit to policy makers, students, guidance counsellors, teachers and many others with an interest in education.

The first destinations survey is a single point-in-time survey and does not capture the longer-term outcomes from higher education to graduates and society more generally. In order to obtain longitudinal data on the employment outcomes of graduates, the HEA has begun working in collaboration with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to link HEA graduate data with data from the Revenue Commissioners and Social Protection to form a longitudinal administrative study of graduate outcomes. The data will show employability and further study outcomes, sectors of employment and earnings (amongst other outcomes) of graduates up to 5 years after graduation.

This work will represent a landmark contribution to the evidence base on higher education outcomes, providing a rich longitudinal information set on graduate employment, unemployment and earnings outcomes. The report of this longitudinal administrative study is due to be published in Quarter 4 2017.

It should also be noted that the CSO's Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) and Quarterly National Household survey (QNHS) also cover a broad range of issues in relation to employment and unemployment rates; earnings and occupations; and income and living conditions of the population. Although this data does not routinely focus on levels of educational attainment, it provides a significant data source on the principal economic situation of the population.

Schools Health and Safety

507. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will liaise with a school (details supplied) in County Cork to discuss the proposals which can be formulated and the way in which funding may be obtained in conjunction with his Department

to deal with the serious issues pertaining to parking at the school. [27414/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In general, individual school authorities are responsible, in the first instance, for ensuring the safety and welfare of children and others in their care.

The issue of road safety measures outside the vested site areas of schools, such as road signage, traffic calming measures etc., is a matter for the relevant local authority. Local Authorities have the power to decide on road safety measures outside schools to ensure that measures are in place to protect the safety of local school children. My Department has no function in this matter.

Should safety measures be required within the vested school site it is open to the school authority to make an application for funding under any future Summer Works Scheme.

Ministerial Correspondence

508. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received correspondence from a group (details supplied) dated 20 December 2016 regarding the lumper schools project; if he has replied to the correspondence and the proposal; and if not, when a reply will issue. [27432/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is keen to support Famine commemoration where it is feasible and practicable to do so. My officials have been in correspondence with the committee whose details were supplied and sought detailed clarification regarding the project in question. This includes seeking copies of the literature being proposed for issue to schools, clarification regarding how the project would work during school closure periods (i.e. holiday times), and ascertaining how the project is being rolled out in Northern Ireland, and to what extent. When these further details are provided, they can be considered by my Department.

Green-Schools is Ireland's leading environmental management and education programme for schools. Promoting long-term, whole-school action for the environment Green-Schools is a student led programme with involvement from the wider community. The programme is operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce (Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) member for Ireland).

Green-Schools is operated in partnership with Local Authorities and is supported by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government; Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; The Department of Arts, Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Irish Aid, National Transport Authority; National Parks and Wildlife Service, Irish Water and the Wrigley Company Limited.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

509. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contracts received for Ministerial approval from Caranua to date in 2017; the date on which each application was received by his Department; the effective date of each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27442/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua wish to contract

for a fully integrated financial software package in 2017 and this was sanctioned on 1st June 2017.

Departmental Contracts

510. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27450/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I refer to the Deputy's question concerning contracts awarded to Accenture since March 2011 by my Department. One contract was awarded to Accenture since 2011 by my Department. Details are as follows:

Date of Contract	Cost of Contract	Details
September 2013	€5,904	Review of the Draft Management Framework Agreement between the City of Dublin Education & Training Board (CDETB) and the Department of Education & Skills regarding Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI).

Any engagement of external consultants is done in accordance with the provisions of the Department of Finance "Guidelines for the Engagement of Consultants and other External Support by the Civil Service." Since March 2016, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) have a framework in place for All of Government (AoG) Business & Management Consultancy & Advisory Services for contracts in excess of €25,000. Accenture is one of 29 companies on the OGP framework.

With regard to bodies under the aegis of my Department the information sought is a matter for each agency and is not collated centrally.

Teaching Contracts

511. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is within the regulations of his Department to timetable a teacher who has opted out of the supervision and substitution scheme for post-primary schools for the supervision of lunchtime detention as part of their class contact hours for the purpose of claiming incremental salary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27458/17]

512. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will define the term class contact hours; the number of class contact hours that can be allocated to an assistant principal in a whole time permanent position in a community and comprehensive school for the purposes of claiming incremental salary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27459/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 511 and 512 together.

Arising from the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013 – 2016 (Haddington Road Agreement) and with effect from the beginning of the 2013/14 school year, participation in the Supervision and Substitution scheme is compulsory for all post –primary teachers save for those

who availed of an opt-out arrangement put in place at that time under my Departments Circular 0006/2014. Participation in this scheme is additional to existing teacher class contact hours. Teachers in Community and Comprehensive schools are generally timetabled for up to 22 class contact hours per week which equates to about 33 class periods. Assistant Principals in Community and Comprehensive schools who are required to undertake significant extra responsibilities may have their class contact hours reduced by school management to 18 per week.

Teacher Recruitment

513. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has issued or will issue circular letters to schools regarding the importance of appointing teachers to vacancies in schools which actually match the curricular needs of the school; if so, the year and number of the circular letter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27462/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24 of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012). The policy of my Department is to ensure, as far as possible, that the Managerial Authorities of Primary and Post Primary schools give priority to unemployed registered teachers who are fully qualified when filling vacant teaching posts. However my Department has issued a number of Circulars addressing this issue in recent years. Circular 31/2011 details a cascade of measures for the recruitment of teachers, prioritising registered teachers over retired registered teachers and unregistered people.

Circular Letter 31/2011 states that each employer shall ensure that each person proposed for appointment to a teaching post for which salary grant is being sought must be registered with the Teaching Council and have qualifications appropriate to the sector and suitable to the post for which he/she is to be employed.

Language Schools

514. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet with a group (details supplied); the reason a previous request to meet with this group was refused; if he will address the concerns that it has raised with his Department regarding its industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27493/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract, and issues relating to working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department. If teachers working in the English language sector have a concern about their terms and conditions of employment they should contact the National Employment Rights Authority in this regard. This was previously communicated to the group referred to by the Deputy.

The regulations governing ACELS (Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services), which is operated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland on a voluntary basis, and the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), which is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department, specify a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers.

National Training Fund

515. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount in the investment account of the national training fund; and the investments which can be made from the fund. [27521/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): There is currently €208m in the investment account of the National Training Fund, which is invested in monthly Exchequer Notes issued by the National Treasury Management Agency.

The National Training Fund Act 2000 provides that the National Training Fund should consist of a current account, which is managed and controlled by the Minister for Education and Skills, and an investment account, which is managed and controlled by the Minister for Finance.

Under Section 2(6) of the Act, moneys standing to the credit of the investment account of the Fund shall be invested by the Minister for Finance. Section 2(8) provides that income arising from any such investment shall be paid into that account. Section 2(9) specifies the form of investment which may be undertaken, namely securities, other than shares, and the placing of funds in deposit accounts in any financial institution or invested in short term financial products such as certificates of deposit or commercial paper issued by any person.

School Accommodation Provision

516. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in having an application finalised for a school (details supplied) in view of the urgent need to have this accommodation in place by September 2017. [27523/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that additional accommodation comprising of a mainstream classroom and a resource room has recently been approved by my Department to the school referred to. The school authorities have been advised of my Department’s decision.

School Accommodation

517. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties and the physical conditions of the classrooms being experienced by students and staff in a school (details supplied); and if his attention has been further drawn to a verbal agreement made by his Department to the school prior to the original sharing of the school site. [27524/17]

518. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to upgrade the school premises at a school (details supplied). [27525/17]

519. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will visit a school (details supplied) in order to view the school in the near future. [27526/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 517 to 519, inclusive, together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has visited the school in question and has advised the principal that further contact will be made with the school in due course.

Teacher Recruitment

520. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if approval will be given to the appointment of a fourth classroom teacher at a school (details supplied) for September 2017 in view of the fact that this is a DEIS school and enrolment figures are on the increase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27682/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy did not make any application for consideration by the Appeals Board at either its April meeting or June meeting. The next meeting of the Appeals Board will be held in October. The school has submitted an application for consideration at this meeting.

Lansdowne Road Agreement

521. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to support and allow non-union teachers to access to the benefits of the Lansdowne Road agreement in view of the fact that all non-union teachers cannot sign the agreement; if he will consider this proposal in view of the new pay deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27684/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Lansdowne Road Agreement as set out in Section 2 of Circular 0045/2016 applied to teachers employed in Education and Training Board schools and centres (except for Designated Community Colleges). The agreement also applied to teachers employed in Designated Community Colleges, Community and Comprehensive Schools and Voluntary Secondary Schools who are TUI members. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2013 and 2015 as set out in Section 3 of the Circular were applied to all other teachers employed in such schools.

As is the norm with public service collective agreements, the Lansdowne Road Agreement was negotiated with trade unions which are recognised as representing staff in the public service (including teachers). It is normal practice in the public service that the decision of the trade union recognised as holding representative rights for a particular grade or sector will determine the position for all relevant staff in that grade/sector. This context does not allow for acceptance or rejection of collective agreements by staff on an individual basis.

However, I welcome the recent decision taken by the special convention of ASTI members to immediately suspend all industrial action relating to the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) and Junior Certificate reform.

As a result of the suspension of industrial action by ASTI members, a number of direct financial advantages will apply to all teachers (both ASTI members and those teachers who are not members of a trade union) and who were not previously covered by the Lansdowne Road

Agreement (LRA). The measures to take effect from the date of the suspension of industrial action include:

- Pay improvements for post 2012 entrant teachers through the immediate payment of the first phase new salary scales (Second phase January 2018);
- An immediate lifting on the freeze on the payment of increments;
- Pay increase for all teachers through the addition of the first moiety (€796) of the S&S allowance to the teacher pay scale (Second moiety due September 2017);
- Pay increase of €1,000 through the bringing forward of the 1 September pay increase;
- An improvement in pay scales by the restoration of the alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions for higher earners;
- An improvement in pay scales through the payment of the first phase of the reversal of the FEMPI Act pay reductions for higher earners (Second phase in 2018).

Further to the above, teachers who were not previously covered by the LRA will also be covered by the terms of the Ward circular from the date of the suspension of industrial action, including the reduced qualifying period for a CID and the removal of the career break and secondment categories of objective grounds. In addition to earlier permanency, the measures to take effect include a revised sequence for the filling of posts to enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more quickly and easier than before.

Other benefits which will be available to teachers not previously covered by the LRA include:

- Availability of promotion posts announced in budget 2017 based on arrangements to be set out in a new Department Circular;
- S&S opt-out option for teachers with a minimum of 15 years' service;
- S&S opt-in option for teachers who had previously opted out;
- An increase in the quantum of Croke Park hours which can be worked on other than whole-school basis;
- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours;
- Access to redeployment;
- Provision of professional time associated with the implementation of the Junior Cycle.

Steps are now being taken by my officials to give effect to the above measures. The continuing restoration of the financial and other benefits are contingent on the continuing application of the suspension of all industrial action. In the event that the suspension of industrial action by members of the ASTI is not sustained, the restoration measures above would stand to be reversed.

SOLAS Administration

522. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the 2016 annual report for SOLAS will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[27697/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The SOLAS 2016 Annual Report has recently been received by my Department.

Arrangements are being made to have it laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in accordance with Section 32(1) of the Further Education and Training Act, 2013. The report will be published as soon as this process is complete.

Higher Education Authority Staff

523. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to fill the number of vacancies on the board of the Higher Education Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27698/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The appointment process to fill the current vacancies on the Board of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) is underway. My Department is working with the Public Appointments Service in this regard.

Departmental Expenditure

524. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27707/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department awarded a contract to the company in question for advice relating to the development of a new DEIS Identification Process. No fees have been paid to date.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) recently awarded a tender to the same company to develop a “Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education”. No payments have been made to date.

School Accommodation Provision

525. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding an application; and the position regarding same. [27718/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department approved a mainstream classroom to the school in question recently. The school authority has been advised accordingly.

Departmental Correspondence

526. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied). [27725/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is keen to support Famine commemoration where it is feasible and practicable to do so. My officials have

been in correspondence with the individual whose details were supplied and sought detailed clarification regarding the project in question. This includes seeking copies of the literature being proposed for issue to schools, clarification regarding how the project would work during school closure periods (i.e. holiday times), and ascertaining how the project is being rolled out in Northern Ireland, and to what extent. When these further details are provided, they can be considered by my Department.

Green-Schools is Ireland's leading environmental management and education programme for schools. Promoting long-term, whole-school action for the environment Green-Schools is a student led programme with involvement from the wider community. The programme is operated and co-ordinated by the Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce (Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) member for Ireland).

Green-Schools is operated in partnership with Local Authorities and is supported by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government; Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; The Department of Arts, Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Irish Aid, National Transport Authority; National Parks and Wildlife Service, Irish Water and the Wrigley Company Limited.

School Transport Administration

527. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria that can be used to request an amendment to an existing route in view of the fact that most school catchment areas are based on historic information. [27746/17]

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.

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and routing of each dedicated school transport service which is determined by the number and location of children who are eligible for school transport each year.

Where practicable, and subject to considerations of cost and logistics, routes are planned to avoid an eligible child attending a primary school having to travel more than 2.4 kilometres to or from a pick up/set down point or to have travel and waiting times in excess of 1.5 hours per day; at post primary level the travel distance is 3.2 kilometres to or from a pick up/ set down point and travel and waiting time is 2.5 hours.

Parents of children, who are eligible for school transport, should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office if they feel their school bus service is operating outside of the above guidelines.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Questions Nos. 528 and 529 answered with Question No. 493.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

530. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the concerns of a person (details supplied) regarding their child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27778/17]

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

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

My Department provides a range of supports for schools which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure that, wherever a child is enrolled, they will have access to an appropriate education.

The range of supports and services which are made available to schools include additional learning and resource teaching support, Special Needs Assistants support, funding for the purchase of specialised equipment, services of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), enhanced levels of capitation in Special schools and Special Classes and additional teacher training.

The Special Education Support Service (SESS), which provides continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in how to assist pupils with special educational needs, including children with ASD, transferred to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on 20th March 2017. The SESS comes under the auspices of the NCSE's Regional Support Service which was established to provide an integrated and coherent service to assist schools in supporting children with special education needs.

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.

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

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

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

The NCSE continues to establish additional special classes to support children with Special Educational Needs including Autism as required. Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of such classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1153 across the country now, of which 889 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

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

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

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

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

The NCSE also provides information for Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs through its website (www.ncse.ie) and Pamphlet Series which inform parents and guardians of supports and services available for children and young people with ASD and their families, including special transport arrangements which may be made available.

Further support is provided to children and their families by the Middletown Centre for Autism in Co. Armagh. This centre is jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. The Centre provides a comprehensive nationwide training service for parents and educational professionals. Parents can view the range of courses which the Centre has available through the website www.middletownautism.com.

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular child, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention and direct reply.

Schools Building Projects Status

531. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of plans to extend a school (details supplied); and when the proposed works will commence. [27807/17]

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

My Department will be in contact with the school authority in the context of initiating the architectural planning process in due course.

Education Schemes

532. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the discussion his Department has had with Safefood on the introduction of its media awareness course media-wise in schools. [27812/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I recently attended the

launch of mediawise - the new educational resource for primary schools developed by safefood. This is a very important topic for our children to learn about from an early age and that is why it is currently addressed in the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Through this curriculum, media awareness is promoted and children are encouraged to examine and explore various forms of media. Schools may choose to complement their existing programmes with the mediawise resource.

Departmental Reviews

533. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date of the commencement of his Department's review into the operations and eligibility criteria for Caranua; the persons appointed to carry out that review; and the terms of reference for same. [27821/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware and indeed made a submission when the draft terms of reference for the proposed eligibility review was published on the Department's website. The analysis of the submissions has been completed and will be published on the Department's website shortly, together with the terms of reference. The actual eligibility review will be conducted internally.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board

534. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if Caranua has completed its internal review as indicated in the board minutes of July 2016 into changes made to the application process; and when the findings of the review will be published. [27822/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. The review referred to by the Deputy and agreed at the Board meeting in July is, I understand, a review of the revised application process. I have asked Caranua to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

School Funding

535. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional funding will be provided for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27827/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school to which the Deputy refers has sought additional funding for an approved project. This is being assessed and a decision will issue directly to the school authority shortly.

School Transport

536. **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. [27876/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Currently almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary

schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes and endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service in the context of the Scheme nationally.

Routes are planned so that, as far as possible, no eligible child will have more than 2.4 kilometres to travel to a pick-up point. Children living off the main route of a service are generally expected to make their own way, or to be brought to convenient pick-up points along the main route. Home pick-ups were never envisaged as being part of the Primary School Transport Scheme as the cost involved on a national level would be prohibitive.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Departmental Properties

537. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take regarding the hold up in progress at a school (details supplied) in Cashel, County Tipperary, in the provision of car parking at the school complex due to the delay in the transfer of land from the Department of Health to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27893/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, officials in my Department are currently working to progress the acquisition of the property in question from the Health Service Executive. This process is currently at conveyancing stage.

I can assure the Deputy that all parties are working to advance matters as quickly as possible.

School Accommodation Provision

538. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will take steps to ensure that an application for vital and necessary accommodation by a school (details supplied) is immediately progressed in view of the fact that there are not adequate facilities available to accommodate learning support, resource support and to facilitate teaching of the physical education curriculum regardless of weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27926/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

Third Level Admissions Data

539. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure access to institutions of education for students in view of media reports that University College Dublin will be reducing the number of places available for Irish students in reaction to funding issues. [27927/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Higher Education Authority (HEA) provides funding to Higher Education Institutions on the basis of the number of students enrolled.

The HEA does not place a ceiling on the number of students in higher education. There have been significant increases in student numbers over the last number of years with expected further increases projected in line with student demand.

In the context of Budget 2017, I gave a commitment to a three year package of increased higher education investment, and the inclusion within that of an allowance for increased demographics, and this will help to facilitate the continued provision by the sector in line with need.

Appointments to State Boards

540. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28213/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Department officials have checked records relating to board appointments of former TD's since the Public Appointments Service (PAS) process for board appointments came on stream in 2011.

I am advised that one former TD, Mr Brian Fleming was appointed to the Board of the State Examinations Commission through the PAS process. Mr Fleming's term of office as a Commissioner was from April 2012 to April 2015.

In regard to the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department one further former TD served between the period 2013 to 2017 (Mr Austin Currie served on the Board of Caranua from 2013 to March 2017), however the PAS process was not utilised for this appointment.

Redundancy Payments

541. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which a redundancy calculation was decided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27942/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The person in question was paid a redundancy lump sum based on her regular weekly earnings for the 12 months prior to the date of redundancy in respect of her employment for the period 4th October 2004 to 31st August 2015 in line with the provisions of the Redundancy Acts 1967 - 2016.

Prior to the post being made redundant the number of hours allocated to the post had decreased from 32 to 16 hours per week from 1st September 2014. A claim was submitted by the person for compensation for loss of hours in respect of the period 1st September 2006 to 31st August 2014 and that claim was paid on 20 November 2014.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

542. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an emergency application by a school (details supplied). [27944/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has no record of an Emergency Works Grant application from the school to which the Deputy refers. The school should contact the Devolved Projects Section of my Department's Planning and Building Unit in Tullamore to discuss this, or alternatively, it may submit a copy of its application to that Section for consideration.

Schools Property

543. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the sale of playing pitches used by a college (details supplied) in County Dublin, by the Christian Brothers; the actions his Department has taken on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27952/17]

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.

The 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 educational needs 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 has written 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. The congregation have advised that they will reply to my Department in the coming weeks.

Commemorative Events

544. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the introduction of the lumper schools project to schools to increase the knowledge and awareness

of the Great Famine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27984/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is keen to support Famine commemoration where it is feasible and practicable to do so. My officials will seek further clarification regarding the project in question. This will include seeking copies of the literature being proposed for issue to schools, clarification regarding how the project would work during the period when schools are closed (i.e. holiday times), and ascertaining an understanding of how the project is being rolled out in Northern Ireland. When these details have been provided, they will be considered by my Department and a decision made.

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Special Educational Needs Service Provision

545. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision will issue regarding an appeal of a special education teaching allocation by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27986/17]

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, including the school to which the Deputy has referred, will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

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

The additional funding will provide 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.

Schools who wished to submit an appeal were asked to do so by March 31st 2017.

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

The NCSE has advised that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an appeal. The NCSE will advise schools of the outcome of appeals before the end of June.

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

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

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

546. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an emergency works grant will be provided to a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27992/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department has approved a grant for the school to which he refers to carry out access for all works. The school has been notified accordingly.

School Curriculum

547. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the lack of availability of the leaving certificate applied programme in post-primary schools in County Leitrim on the grounds of the discriminatory exclusion of suitable educational options for children living in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27996/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is one of a number of options made available by my Department for Senior Cycle students which schools can choose from, based on the education needs and interests of their student.

It is the responsibility and choice of each individual school to decide to put in place the LCA programme, based on the educational needs and interests of their students. It is also for schools to decide on the admittance of a student to the programme, in their school. Schools are encouraged to provide maximum access to these options and to have clear procedures in place regarding how the available places are allocated to students.

Schools that choose to organise the LCA programme are entitled to an additional fixed allocation of 0.5 of a teaching post, over the standard allocation. There is no minimum number of LCA pupils required for schools to secure the additional teaching allocation from my Department.

The number of students taking LCA varies across counties. The Department's information indicates that a school in Leitrim is providing the LCA for final year students this school year 2016/2017 (i.e. exam sittings in 2017).

My Department is committed to supporting this programme, which is appropriate for members of the student cohort whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes (Leaving Certificate Established and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme). That is why I have asked the NCCA to consider the LCA, as part of its review of Senior Cycle which commenced in 2017. This review will help to ensure curriculum development continues to respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

School Curriculum

548. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to prevent individual schools from opting not to have the leaving certificate applied programme available to students as an option in view of the fact that it promotes elitism, discrimination and attaches a stigma to this programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27997/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is one of a number of options made available by my Department for Senior Cycle students which schools can choose from, based on the education needs and interests of their student.

It is the responsibility and choice of each individual school to decide to put in place the LCA programme, based on the educational needs and interests of their students. It is also for schools to decide on the admittance of a student to the programme, in their school. Schools are encouraged to provide maximum access to these options and to have clear procedures in place

regarding how the available places are allocated to students.

Schools that choose to organise the LCA programme are entitled to an additional fixed allocation of 0.5 of a teaching post, over the standard allocation. There is no minimum number of LCA pupils required for schools to secure the additional teaching allocation from my Department.

My Department is committed to supporting this programme, which is appropriate for members of the student cohort whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes (Leaving Cert Established and Leaving Cert Vocational Programme). That is why I have asked the NCCA to consider the LCA, as part of its review of Senior Cycle which commenced in 2017. This review will help to ensure curriculum development continues to respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

Irish Language

549. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the additional costs for an English medium school to transition to an Irish medium school. [28004/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the transition of English-medium schools to Irish-medium schools in the context of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. Under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, which is a key component of my Department's Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022, schools located in Gaeltacht language-planning areas can apply to seek recognition as Gaeltacht schools. To achieve Gaeltacht school recognition, schools will be required to operate entirely through the medium of Irish, apart from the teaching of English (and other language curricula in post-primary schools), in accordance with language-based criteria set out in the Policy. Schools that are participating in the Scheme will be granted additional resources and supports.

It is not possible to state the costs involved for individual schools in fulfilling the criteria for recognition as a Gaeltacht school due to varying school contexts. However, the Government has made available €1m to support a range of actions under the Policy on Gaeltacht Education in 2017 and this figure is anticipated to grow in coming years as the full range of actions in the Policy are implemented.

School Expulsions

550. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of section 29 appeals that were made against secondary schools in County Kildare to secure places for students that had been denied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28007/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position is my Department does not hold statistics for individual counties for section 29 appeals, this protects the privacy of individuals taking appeals on behalf of their children.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme Eligibility

551. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28008/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 to oversee the use of cash contributions of up to €110 million, pledged by religious congregations, to support the needs of survivors of institutional child abuse. The legislation provides that supports may be available in the areas of health and personal social services, mental health services, education and housing.

Where an applicant is not satisfied with how Caranua has dealt with his/her application, the legislation provides for an independent appeals mechanism. I am aware that there is a backlog of appeals in the system and I have recently appointed two appeals officers to try and deal with that backlog.

I have also asked Caranua to reply directly to the Deputy on this individual's case.

Public Sector Staff Career Breaks

552. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school teachers availing of the career break scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28010/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the 2016/17 school year there are one thousand five hundred and seventy teachers in primary schools availing of the career break scheme.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

553. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason SUSI is allowed a specific write-off pertaining to overpayments made to certain students (details supplied). [28029/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): SUSI operates a comprehensive set of processes and controls to manage the assessment process and to minimise the risk of incorrectly awarding grants. However, the nature of the assessment process undertaken by SUSI means that there is a risk that some students may be awarded maintenance grants and/or fee grants for which they are not eligible.

Where overpayments do occur, SUSI treats the overpayment as a debt to the exchequer and seeks to ensure that all such payments are recovered from the student. This approach is consistent with the general policy and principle regarding the recovery of debt, as set out in the Student Support Act 2011.

When an overpayment is identified, SUSI will write to the student to inform him/her of the decision to vary the grant amount and to advise that recovery (repayment) of the overpayment will be necessary. A further letter will then issue to formally advise of the overpayment amount and to request repayment. This letter includes a Grant Repayment Option Form which requests details of the preferred repayment option.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Applicants may also appeal against decisions made by SUSI in relation to overpayments.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by an appeals of-

ficer in SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via www.student-grantappeals.ie

Some difficulties were encountered by SUSI in its first year of operations when processes and procedures were being rolled out for the first time. In light of the circumstances in which these overpayments incurred, the approval of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform was obtained for write-off of these specific overpayments as an exceptional measure in March 2016.

Since 2013, SUSI has made significant improvements to its internal control systems and procedures to enhance control and reduce the potential of future overpayments occurring. These include comprehensive training for new staff as well as updates for existing staff on new scheme rules, and improved quality control procedures including random sample checking of ongoing grant applications by SUSI's Quality Assurance Team. SUSI has also strengthened data sharing processes with other relevant agencies such as the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Revenue Commissioners, as a means of ensuring significantly improved accuracy when assessing grant eligibility.

Teacher Redeployment

554. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is State regulation as to the way in which panels for the employment of teachers in particular church dioceses operate in respect of schools under Catholic patronage. [28039/17]

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

Thereafter, vacancies are filled from the Supplementary panel which is created for eligible primary teachers in fixed-term/temporary positions (this includes substitute positions) and in part-time positions who meet the relevant eligibility criteria.

The redeployment arrangements are published on my Departments website and operate in the same way for all Patron bodies.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

555. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that in future all decisions are made in a timely manner in order that new appointments can be made prior to the summer holiday break regarding the new model for the allocation of teaching hours for special education needs to post primary schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28049/17]

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

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

to schools.

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

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

The NCSE notified all schools of their special education teaching allocations for September 2017 on 7th March 2017.

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

Schools who wished to submit an appeal were asked to do so by March 31st 2017.

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

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

In advance of any submission of an appeal, schools were asked to read carefully the DES Circulars and in particular the relevant sections, which relate to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

It is regretted that the consideration of the appeals could not be concluded in advance of 31st May this year, however, the NCSE has now confirmed that this process will be concluded as soon as possible.

I can also confirm that in future years, when an appeal process is being put in place, that the NCSE will endeavour to conclude the appeal process before the end of the school year.

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

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

Schools Building Projects Status

556. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 198 of 30 May 2017, the estimated timeframe for the process for the school building; and when he expects that teaching will begin on this site. [28060/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Where a requirement for additional schools has been identified, details including proposed timelines related to the opening of the schools, are made known by a Ministerial announcement following which a patronage assessment process is carried out to determine who will operate such schools.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Irish Greyhound Board has accepted an offer of €23m made by my Department for the acquisition of the Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium property. The acquisition is subject to contract and a change in the zoning for the property in order to facilitate school development.

The offer to acquire this site was made in the context of the future need for school places in the area which will exceed current supply. Suitable potential school sites in the area are limited, and this site is ideally located given its relatively central location.

My Department's professional and technical staff have conducted a feasibility study of the Harold's Cross site and this technical assessment concluded that the property is suitable for the provision of a significant level of school accommodation.

Officials from my Department have engaged in preliminary discussions with officials in Dublin City Council with respect to the potential development of the property. The development of school infrastructure on the site is contingent upon a change to the current zoning. Subject to the required change to zoning, my Department will work closely with the Council officials to meet planning requirements.

As the Deputy will appreciate, timeframes for the process for a school building, which include planning and zoning considerations, vary considerably and it is not possible at this point to provide a timeframe for teaching to begin on the site due to a number of factors some of which are outside the control of my Department.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

557. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to fund speech and language classes in primary schools with a high concentration of need for speech and language therapies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28107/17]

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.

In the interim, my Department continues to provide an extensive range of 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. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports, including applications to establish special classes for SSLD. Applications meeting the criteria for establishment are approved by the NCSE.

The NCSE continues to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas and has capacity to establish such new special classes where necessary, subject to the willingness of schools to open classes. The NCSE welcomes expressions of interest from schools in opening special classes to meet the demand for special class provision. In deciding on the location of a special class SENOs take into account both the present and the future potential need for special class provision, and they must also be satisfied that the special class is sustainable and appropriately located. SENOs liaise with relevant professionals in their area to arrive at an informed decision.

The opening of a Speech and Language class is, however, contingent on the HSE being in a position to provide Speech and Language therapy to the students in the class. The criteria for enrolment in a special class for pupils with SSLD is set out in my Department's Circular 0038/2007. It should be noted, however, that pupils who are 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 where he/she is enrolled in mainstream school.

At present, pupils with mild speech and language difficulties may qualify for supplementary teaching support from within the school's general allocation of learning support/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.

A new model for allocating Teaching Resources to schools to support students with Special Educational Needs, as recommended by the NCSE, will be implemented with effect from September 2017. The revised allocation model replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the NCSE allocation process which provided additional resource teaching supports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities. Allocations of special education teaching resources were issued for all schools in March 2017. My Department's Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools, which were published on 7th March 2017, set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools. Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers have also been published.

The new model will provide a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability.

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.

Schools Building Projects Status

558. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Buncrana three school campus project (details supplied); if he will report on a recent meeting between his department and Donegal county council to discuss site acquisition; if he will meet with a delegation to discuss the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28108/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana is included on my Department's capital programme.

At the recent meeting with the Council the preferred site option was confirmed and the next steps to progress an acquisition were identified and initiated. In that context, officials from the Council, on behalf of my Department, have engaged further with the landowner in question.

I have received a request to meet with representatives of the school authorities and a reply will issue to the school authorities in respect of this request. I can assure the Deputy that all parties are working to bring this acquisition process to a completion as early as possible.

Education and Training Boards Funding

559. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding to each ETB or VEC in each of the years from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28115/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 1 July 2013 the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) were dissolved and replaced with 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). My Department is responsible for the disbursement of pay and non-pay grants to each of the 16 ETBs in respect of a range of school and non-school based services.

Details of funding provided by my Department to the ETB Sector for the period 2009 to 2017 are outlined in the attached tables.

The figures provided include funding for pay to ETB staff (including teachers), funding for the day-to-day running of schools, specific grants (e.g. book grant, transition year programme), targeted expenditure (e.g. DEIS funding), funding for student grants, funding for capital projects (which can vary from year to year depending on number of projects) and also ETB head office running costs.

The enrolments in each ETB are a main driver of funding levels. Each ETB has a high level of autonomy in the management and appropriation of this funding and may distribute its allocation in line with its priorities and perceptions of need.

From 2014 onwards, funding in respect of Further & Adult Education that was previously channelled to the ETB sector directly by my Department is now channelled indirectly via SOLAS and has therefore been omitted from the list from 2014.

The initial allocations for 2017 in respect of Department of Education and Skills funding were issued to ETBs on the 15th February 2017 and may be subject to change as the year

evolves.

It should be noted that ETBs also receive funding from sources other than my Department, for example through self-financing programmes or from other Departments and agencies.

The annual accounts for the former VECs (and now for each ETB) provide detailed information on funding from all sources and how it was used. These accounts, when finalised and audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, are published on the Oireachtas website.

PQ Ref: 28115/17 - DES Funding to VECs for the Period 2009 to June 2013

VEC	2009*	2010*	2011*	2012*	Jan to June 2013*
City of Cork	€47,266,557.27	€46,612,531.48	€43,874,290.51	€40,838,675.31	€19,138,953.60
City of Dublin	€145,457,126.68	€145,063,049.68	€133,540,495.52	€200,038,144.06	€139,366,772.08
City of Limerick	€25,485,245.47	€25,634,639.81	€25,434,263.13	€23,949,343.88	€12,392,971.61
City of Waterford	€17,959,599.78	€18,094,658.72	€17,762,156.93	€15,889,487.50	€7,634,692.09
Dun Laoghaire	€19,334,276.60	€20,144,464.84	€18,768,629.67	€18,141,383.33	€11,237,976.74
City of Galway	€26,895,103.92	€22,596,607.52	€21,839,116.98	€20,001,848.40	€8,858,419.17
Co. Carlow	€20,729,284.17	€20,463,620.62	€19,782,320.79	€17,699,511.94	€8,193,003.46
Co. Cavan	€26,076,727.94	€27,233,310.79	€25,941,252.35	€25,061,728.11	€10,860,790.82
Co. Clare	€29,900,462.06	€28,913,790.50	€29,989,394.19	€25,360,721.01	€12,109,919.41
Co. Cork	€88,087,502.31	€88,075,452.39	€87,171,283.90	€82,012,895.14	€40,779,044.99
Co. Donegal	€51,822,967.82	€55,400,641.90	€52,275,803.01	€46,098,955.73	€22,584,141.76
Co. Dublin	€130,402,015.10	€132,550,716.27	€116,531,125.22	€114,361,997.94	€56,200,984.48
Co. Galway	€32,859,680.06	€34,430,424.73	€33,541,483.66	€30,654,575.66	€15,390,745.70
Co. Kerry	€37,437,797.68	€39,608,016.62	€35,210,075.80	€31,830,634.65	€15,189,155.65
Co. Kildare	€50,617,161.23	€44,132,751.27	€61,729,127.25	€38,923,833.53	€19,064,789.24
Co. Kilkenny	€26,038,660.59	€26,297,926.64	€24,532,102.20	€23,526,494.39	€10,982,866.22
Co. Laois	€18,605,626.41	€16,725,876.00	€17,678,159.92	€15,403,796.36	€7,330,008.27
Co. Leitrim	€13,501,207.88	€12,023,780.94	€10,941,993.58	€10,035,971.98	€4,865,995.64
Co. Limerick	€37,465,205.68	€37,650,900.18	€37,723,997.92	€37,224,714.91	€17,958,927.31
Co. Longford	€15,141,524.75	€14,587,481.46	€12,608,444.82	€11,897,532.41	€5,490,548.44
Co. Louth	€32,256,613.65	€33,668,156.42	€31,681,941.61	€28,349,394.98	€13,468,951.29
Co. Mayo	€31,263,199.60	€30,582,350.88	€28,566,665.17	€25,370,645.09	€12,053,717.21
Co. Meath	€47,359,940.91	€40,262,607.38	€45,090,528.54	€48,909,633.57	€23,769,558.57
Co. Monaghan	€26,354,330.78	€27,158,173.10	€24,120,962.01	€53,517,737.96	€10,148,988.25
Co. Offaly	€19,941,766.87	€19,796,079.96	€19,577,338.27	€18,193,818.91	€8,804,818.92
Co. Roscommon	€12,712,639.35	€12,575,399.87	€12,871,209.33	€11,442,371.61	€5,803,609.33
Co. Sligo	€17,096,125.74	€17,304,103.58	€15,463,107.40	€15,154,059.64	€7,102,643.54
Co. Tipperary NR	€25,506,523.62	€24,627,065.89	€24,769,334.49	€28,871,365.23	€12,189,423.66
Co. Tipperary SR	€23,602,778.41	€23,489,246.14	€21,762,259.86	€21,125,419.29	€9,703,106.97
Co. Waterford	€13,889,027.21	€13,073,058.62	€14,231,374.92	€12,446,994.29	€6,317,727.06
Co. Westmeath	€21,088,901.24	€19,219,646.59	€19,306,834.83	€17,407,260.17	€8,336,010.03
Co. Wexford	€35,553,540.95	€40,646,691.13	€40,165,851.16	€32,135,597.26	€16,820,377.86
Co. Wicklow	€46,557,714.03	€46,884,046.63	€45,149,888.21	€45,024,897.67	€23,180,594.77
Total	€1,214,266,835.76	€1,205,527,268.55	€1,169,632,813.15	€1,186,901,441.91	€603,330,234.14

*payments made in respect of Standard Expenditure (Net Pay & Net Non-Pay), Associated & Targeted Expenditure (grants), Programme Expenditure (Further & Adult Education, Student Support Services, Self-financing Projects, Capital)

PQRef: 28115/17 - DES Funding to ETBs for the Period July 2013 to 2016 including Allocation for 2017*

ETB	July to Dec 2013*	2014**	2015**	2016**	2017 Allocation**
Cavan Monaghan	€20,986,163.04	€36,160,624.56	€39,236,417.57	€44,727,648.28	€40,248,155.18
City of Dublin	€201,551,291.72	€371,272,272.48	€455,087,673.33	€463,806,045.90	€473,093,776.92
Cork	€55,885,372.52	€100,184,515.97	€112,312,667.35	€112,213,942.90	€122,503,044.49
Donegal	€21,082,406.49	€35,596,219.17	€38,879,939.42	€38,017,698.60	€40,870,275.93
Dublin Dun-laoghaire	€60,078,320.68	€108,301,010.80	€113,163,645.92	€107,226,873.97	€115,246,188.33
Galway Roscommon	€30,315,161.90	€46,226,541.39	€52,452,640.63	€44,321,705.66	€53,128,734.27
Kerry	€14,956,110.05	€22,075,106.09	€21,662,185.74	€21,985,906.61	€24,477,272.46
Kildare Wicklow	€40,667,615.00	€71,127,064.21	€77,200,516.10	€75,127,133.75	€74,257,253.09
Kilkenny Carlow	€18,138,537.54	€29,447,019.30	€34,222,752.89	€32,789,076.64	€35,558,353.06
Laois Offaly	€15,335,324.74	€24,762,018.46	€27,564,343.25	€30,695,817.83	€28,322,933.82
Limerick Clare	€39,909,338.41	€62,434,608.20	€61,080,042.99	€65,296,656.68	€68,804,732.31
Longford Westmeath	€13,476,849.43	€19,647,044.86	€21,594,706.94	€23,401,322.36	€24,922,245.82
Louth Meath	€35,750,455.73	€56,468,720.25	€64,740,802.61	€72,952,757.17	€92,722,392.46
Mayo Sligo Leitrim	€23,330,095.36	€35,418,550.25	€37,665,452.82	€36,490,503.43	€39,921,274.17
Tipperary	€19,384,992.52	€30,615,349.11	€29,185,112.49	€31,940,219.76	€34,661,645.35
Waterford Wexford	€27,574,371.58	€39,371,861.87	€40,848,030.37	€42,402,414.52	€42,610,042.39
Total	€638,422,406.71	€1,089,108,526.97	€1,226,896,930.42	€1,243,395,724.07	€1,311,348,320.05

*payments made in respect of Standard Expenditure (Net Pay & Net Non-Pay), Associated & Targeted Expenditure (grants), Programme Expenditure (Further & Adult Education, Student Support Services, Self-financing Projects, Capital)

**payments made in respect of Standard Expenditure (Net Pay & Net Non-Pay), Associated & Targeted Expenditure (grants), Programme Expenditure (Student Support Services, Self-financing Projects, Capital) - Funding in respect of Further & Adult Education not included as this funding is administered through SOLAS with effect from 2014

Schools Building Projects Expenditure

560. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the original cost of the building of the new centre in Belfield; the amount that has been spent by his Department to date in 2017; the cost of the project to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28120/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2013, when the project was originally approved, the estimated cost of the construction of the Confucius Institute building in Belfield was in the region of €7 million. However, UCD has advised that costs have increased over the period since then.

In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills confirmed an allocation of €3 million for the construction of the Confucius Institute. Approximately €995,000 of this has been provided to UCD to date (€195,000 in 2015 and €800,000 in 2016) following verification by the Higher Education Authority of costs incurred. No claim has been received to date in 2017, although it is anticipated that further funding will be provided in 2017/18 up to the maximum of the €3 million commitment.

It should be noted that UCD is responsible for delivery of the project. The Exchequer contribution is fixed at €3 million and any additional costs arising from the project are a matter for

UCD.

Higher Education Institutions

561. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an assessment has been done on the teaching quality of a centre (details supplied) in comparison with similar centres; if so, the results of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28121/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. UCD have established their own quality assurance procedures, having had regard to QQI Guidelines. In addition to encompassing regular periodic reviews of study programmes, UCD is also encouraged to undertake quality reviews of academic, administrative and service departments and, depending on structure, unit-based reviews of schools, faculties and colleges. Institutions may also undertake thematic reviews of institution-wide issues. UCD is required to publish details of its quality assurance procedures and the internal reviews that it carries out. It would be an issue for UCD in the first instance to determine the need for an internal review that encompasses the centre referred to by the Deputy.

UCD provides QQI with an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR). The AIQR provides QQI inter alia with a listing of the UCD cycle of internal reviews along with links to published review reports. The 2015/16 UCD AIQR will be published shortly by QQI.

QQI has established a Policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions. Cyclical Review takes place on a periodic scheduled basis.

English Language Training Organisations

562. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the engagement he has undertaken with English language teachers in relation to plans to replace former regulatory systems for English language teaching schools; if he has received a request to engage with a group (details supplied) on this matter; his plans to carry out consultation on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28122/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As outlined in Ireland's International Education Strategy Government policy for the international education sector is the International Education Mark (IEM). The IEM will be managed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the national agency with responsibility for external quality assurance and qualifications across the further and higher education sectors. The development of the IEM and related Code of Practice for the provision of programmes of education and training to international learners was subject to extensive consultation involving all relevant stakeholders in 2013 and 2014 as part of QQI's comprehensive policy development programme.

Legislative amendments are necessary to facilitate the introduction of the IEM. These amendments are contained in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. The General Scheme of the Bill was approved by Government at the Cabinet meeting on 9th May 2017 and has now been referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny.

My Department has responded to previous correspondence received from the group referred to by the Deputy.

Schools Site Acquisitions

563. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the terms upon which his Department has agreed to the purchase and development of the Harold's cross greyhound stadium; if the site has been deemed suitable for the construction of a school; his views on whether planning permission will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28123/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the Irish Greyhound Board has accepted an offer of €23m made by my Department for the acquisition of the Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium property. The acquisition is subject to contract and a change in the zoning for the property in order to facilitate school development.

The offer to acquire the site was made in the context of the future need for school places in the area which will exceed current supply. Suitable potential school sites in the area are limited, and this site is ideally located given its relatively central location.

My Department's professional and technical staff have conducted a feasibility study of the Harold's Cross site and this technical assessment concluded that the property is suitable for the provision of a significant level of school accommodation.

Officials from my Department have engaged in preliminary discussions with officials in Dublin City Council with respect to the potential development of the property. The development of school infrastructure on the site is contingent upon a change to the current zoning. Subject to the required change to zoning, my Department will work closely with the Council officials to meet planning requirements.

Schools Building Projects Status

564. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the delay in the construction of a permanent building for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin, in view of the fact that the school was promised a new building within three years in 2008; the timeframe for the completion of the new building; the status of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28124/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department provided a purpose built 12 classroom building for the school in question in 2008. The expected life span of this school building is in excess of 25 to 30 years. I also wish to clarify for the Deputy that my Department has not given a commitment to provide a replacement school building. I met with representatives of the school earlier this year and following that meeting my Department has assessed the case being made by the school for a major expansion of the school. Unfortunately, due to the availability of unused school places in adjoining schools, my Department is not in a position to approve the proposal at this time.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

565. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that have been successful in their appeal under the new special needs resource allocation model; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28125/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy

that DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

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

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

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

The NCSE notified all schools of their special education teaching allocations for September 2017 on 7th March 2017.

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

Schools who wished to submit an appeal were asked to do so by March 31st 2017.

The total number of appeals which have been received by the NCSE is 558.

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

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

In advance of any submission of an appeal, schools were asked to read carefully the DES Circulars and in particular the relevant sections, which relate to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

The appeals are currently being processed by the NCSE and it is intended that schools will be notified of the outcome of the appeals by the end of June. At this point it is therefore not possible to advise how many schools have been successful in their appeal.

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

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

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

566. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional supports will be provided to a school (details supplied) in order to address the needs of new enrolments with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28126/17]

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.

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.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

567. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if additional support will be provided to a school (details supplied) in order to facilitate the enrolment of a person (details supplied) [28127/17]

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 215 hours.

This schools allocation for the 2016/17 school year was 159.80 hours, therefore the school is receiving an increased allocation of 55.20 hours, which equates to over two additional full time Special Education Teaching posts and over 8.5 special education teachers in total in the school.

This is a very significant allocation and will ensure that the school can provide additional teaching support for all pupils who need such support in the school.

It is also a feature of the new allocation model that schools are not required to submit new applications for each pupil who has been assessed as having particular condition, as schools have been resourced to support all pupils, whether they have been assessed as having a particular condition or not.

It is therefore not the case that no assistance can be offered to this pupil in the absence of a formal assessment.

Schools are asked to allocate additional teaching support to all pupils who need such support in schools taking account of their individual learning needs.

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.

Special Educational Needs Data

568. Deputy Carol Nolan asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent of training provided to special educational needs organisers in relation to the new resource allocation model; the number of special educational needs organisers that have undergone formal training on the new model; the dates of the training; the duration of the training; the cost of the training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28128/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that in order to provide information and training in relation to the New Model for allocating Special Education Teachers to schools, all schools and some of the support agencies involved, were invited to attend one of nine Regional Information and Training days which were held at various locations around the Country between March and May of this year. These meetings provided information and training in relation to the new allocation model.

As part of this process, all Special Education Needs Officers (SENOs) were invited to attend one of these meetings. 64 Special Education Needs Officers and 10 Senior Special Education Needs Officers attended one of the nationwide events. As the events were designed to provide for the information and training needs of schools and support agencies, as well as Special Education Needs Officers, it is not possible to separate the cost of providing training specifically to the SENOs who attended these events, from the overall cost of the events.

From 20th March 2017, the National Behavioural Support Service, the Special Education Support Service and the Visiting Teacher Service for Children with Visual or Hearing Impairment transferred to the NCSE as part of the process involved in supporting the introduction of the new model of allocation of teaching supports to schools. Together with SENOs, staff in these services will now work in one unified support service for schools comprising over 200 staff.

These staff will continue to build professional capacity in schools and to provide the supports in relation to the allocation of SNA support, school transport, training and upskilling, assistance with behavioural issues, and support in relation to students with a visual or hearing impairment.

Further training for all NCSE staff involved in supporting schools under the new model will be provided, as appropriate, through the 2017/18 school year.

In this context, staff training will be held on 11 and 12 September for all NCSE staff and the main training component will relate to the manner in which the unified support service, including SENOs will provide support to schools. Further training will be provided through the school year in line with the delivery of the NCSE plans to provide support to schools.

State Examinations

569. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rate of payment for exam assessors; the basis on which payment is determined, for example, the hourly rate or per script; the number of assessors for the 2017 examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28129/17]

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.

Postal Codes

570. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [28137/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In order to minimise costs and disruption to the everyday work of my Department, any development work to date to support Eircodes, has been scheduled along with other changes to our systems.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme Expenditure

571. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding to each ETB or VEC under the VTOS programme in each of the years from 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28207/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The following tables outline the funding provided under the VTOS programme to VEC's for the period 2009 - end of June 2013 and to each ETB for the period 1 July 2013 - June 2017.

VTOS Funding provided to VEC's 2009 - June 2013

Vocational Education Committee	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (Jan - June 30th)
Co Carlow	965,369	963,219	790,245	722,583	496,336
Co Cavan	254,268	270,682	454,019	354,743	210,362
Co Clare	2,722,530	2,533,094	2,610,063	2,759,317	1,564,061
Co Cork	786,809	945,310	990,389	1,146,082	664,501
Cork City	3,435,819	3,184,696	3,593,992	3,565,699	2,038,254
Dublin City	13,908,003	13,400,186	12,694,390	15,299,741	9,131,129
Co Dublin	4,807,977	5,206,532	4,990,658	5,111,399	2,968,593

Questions - Written Answers

Vocational Education Committee	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013 (Jan - June 30th)
Dun Laoghaire	1,140,950	1,084,767	1,246,453	1,165,660	658,080
Co Donegal	2,765,480	2,968,532	2,732,813	2,258,520	1,474,460
Galway City	3,114,729	2,727,055	2,944,753	3,279,612	1,896,663
Co Galway	1,965,432	2,279,112	1,996,370	1,935,581	1,097,316
Co Kildare	4,009,491	4,112,030	4,487,078	4,146,615	2,445,572
Co Kilkenny	2,018,657	2,177,244	2,212,102	2,037,914	1,306,734
Co Kerry	3,254,024	3,291,719	3,083,850	2,982,902	1,839,170
Co Laois	1,570,566	1,856,781	1,689,419	1,675,796	993,451
Co Leitrim	502,698	523,397	525,453	585,330	359,342
Co Limerick	1,233,168	1,046,789	1,118,554	1,018,615	622,548
Limerick City	3,644,532	3,544,801	3,573,573	3,777,861	2,189,360
Co Longford	379,437	418,425	548,439	623,611	376,239
Co Louth	1,105,697	1,746,049	1,767,549	1,524,464	925,481
Co Mayo	2,497,758	2,764,412	2,509,882	2,359,219	1,619,545
Co Meath	1,065,059	1,215,541	1,014,858	893,177	600,427
Co Monaghan	238,792	255,621	298,772	364,387	193,800
Co Offaly	670,330	714,206	891,383	921,103	571,423
Co Roscommon	1,342,724	1,246,348	1,310,676	1,091,946	719,718
Co Sligo	989,731	1,015,714	842,468	723,299	515,007
Tipp N.R.	1,252,456	1,639,798	1,342,854	1,355,085	823,457
Tipp S.R.	1,222,780	1,095,922	1,103,337	1,001,602	658,278
Waterford City	3,281,866	3,224,807	3,490,049	3,307,107	2,006,859
Co Waterford	1,648,367	1,218,616	2,165,260	1,651,366	1,042,295
Co Westmeath	1,677,281	1,601,652	1,768,210	1,872,618	1,145,691
Co Wexford	3,554,373	4,004,290	3,463,384	3,486,795	2,154,370
Co Wicklow	4,413,569	4,669,759	4,666,520	4,792,658	2,855,810
	77,440,722	78,947,106	78,917,814	79,792,406	48,164,331

VTOS Funding provided to ETB's July 2013 - 2017

Education Training Boards	2013 (July - Dec)	2014	2015	2016	2017
City of Dublin ETB	5,981,399	14,503,143	12,010,056	12,672,033	6,700,000
Cork ETB	1,850,792	4,726,178	4,090,153	3,786,139	1,957,221
Cavan Monaghan ETB	371,607	630,563	363,485	550,852	282,806
Donegal ETB	913,363	2,554,414	2,674,889	2,410,859	1,249,545
Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB	2,797,587	5,907,740	4,567,692	5,942,642	1,971,328
Galway Roscommon ETB	2,240,254	6,105,538	5,731,001	4,895,661	2,667,974
Kilkenny Carlow ETB	1,099,333	2,988,055	2,534,100	2,873,636	1,497,569
Kerry ETB	1,370,820	3,202,738	3,072,354	2,767,950	1,378,596
Kildare Wicklow ETB	3,116,159	8,540,149	7,907,094	7,968,372	4,164,604
Limerick Clare ETB	2,879,645	7,105,292	6,484,600	7,215,128	3,626,041
Louth Meath ETB	886,108	2,641,929	1,689,109	2,303,812	1,102,983
Laois Offaly ETB	1,094,665	2,701,169	2,650,779	2,711,386	1,425,243

Education Training Boards	2013 (July - Dec)	2014	2015	2016	2017
Longford Westmeath ETB	760,965	2,525,868	1,467,583	2,220,646	1,100,838
Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB	1,651,732	4,330,198	3,492,770	3,669,363	1,876,000
Tipperary ETB	1,044,825	2,640,865	2,858,318	2,532,004	1,302,705
Waterford Wexford ETB	3,522,897	8,369,500	7,824,302	7,979,650	3,992,000
Total:	31,582,151	79,473,339	69,418,285	72,500,133	36,295,451

Schools Building Projects

572. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the announced new educate together secondary school for Malahide and Portmarnock will open for students in September 2017 as previously announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28231/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Patron of the new Malahide/Portmarnock post-primary school (Educate Together) has decided for operational reasons that it is in the best interests of the school to postpone its opening to September 2018. My Department has been working in close co-operation with Educate Together to facilitate the opening of the school and will continue to do so with a view to its opening in suitable interim accommodation in September 2018.

Where a requirement for additional post-primary schools has been identified, details including proposed timelines related to the opening of the schools are made known by a Ministerial announcement. However, patrons may decide for different operational reasons in a particular year that it is in the best interests of a new post-primary school to defer its opening.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

573. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the problem that parents are facing with children diagnosed with autism in securing a place in an ASD class and within their local area; the measures being taken to tackle this problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28235/17]

574. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason funding for ASD classes at secondary level is different to primary level; the reason not all schools have these classes; the reason SENOs and the NCSE do not have the authority to instruct schools to open these classes when there is clearly a need for these classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28237/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, 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 National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE policy advice notes that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

It follows therefore that, where they are able, students should be given every opportunity to participate in mainstream settings and only be enrolled/retained in special class and/or special school settings where their levels of need warrant this.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department 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.

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

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

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

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in the child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

Primary ASD Special Classes are staffed with a lower pupil-teacher ratio of 6:1 and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 pupils.

Primary ASD Special Classes also receive enhanced capitation of €670 per pupil.

Post Primary ASD Special Classes are staffed with a lower pupil–teacher ratio of 6:1.5 and also have Special Needs Assistant support normally amounting to 2 SNAs for a class of 6 pupils. Post Primary ASD Special Classes do not receive enhanced capitation.

The NCSE Policy Advice contains a recommendation that my Department should consider extending the enhanced level of capitation grant for ASD to post-primary schools with special classes on the same basis as primary schools to assist them with the increased running costs associated with these classes.

This recommendation is currently being considered in my Department.

Schools Building Projects Status

575. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will make a school project (details supplied) a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28281/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Stage 2b Detailed Design Report was recently submitted to my Department by the Board of Management and its Design Team. Following receipt of that submission, my Department authorised the Board of Management to instruct its Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process for the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered. This authorisation was granted by my Department in order to expedite the tender process for this project by running the pre-qualification in tandem with the finalisation of Stage 2b. The Design Team has commenced this process and the closing date for the e-tenders advertisement is the 19th June 2017.

Following examination of the Stage 2b Report, some additional items have been requested by my Department. Upon receipt and review of the revised submission, my Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Skills Shortages

576. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to address the shortage of skilled staff such as chefs in the hospitality sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28282/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In 2015 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGSFN) carried out a study on the future skills needs of the hospitality sector. The objective was to assess demand arising within the sector in Ireland including hotels, restaurants, bars, canteens and catering over the period to 2020. The aim was to ensure that there will be the right supply of skills to help drive domestic hospitality sector business and employment growth. The report which was published in November 2015, provides a clear and coherent framework for the development of talent in the hospitality sector in the years ahead to help drive both hospitality business and employment growth which is one of the key goals of the Government's Tourism Policy Statement – People, Place and Policy-Growing Tourism to 2025.

The Study assesses skills demand at all NFQ levels, with a particular focus on career pro-

gression opportunities for those at lower skilled levels to help fill anticipated job openings. The report provides a set of recommendations designed to address the skills requirements of the sector over the period to 2020. A key recommendation in the report was the need to set up a National Oversight and Advisory Group comprising all of the key hospitality stakeholders. Following on this recommendation, the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group was established early last year. Chaired by SOLAS for the first year and now chaired by the Irish Hotels' Federation, it has held ten meetings so far. Membership of the Group includes the Restaurant Association of Ireland, the Irish Hotel Federation, Irish Hospitality Institute, Licensed Vintners Association, Vintners Federation of Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Social Protection, Higher Education Authority, Skillnets, SOLAS, ETBs, IoTs, DIT and Quality and Qualifications Ireland. The role of the Group is to monitor progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the EGFSN and to provide a forum for on-going collaboration in addressing the skills needs of the sector and to identify and progress actions to overcome barriers on its implementation.

The Group will shortly publish an interim report outlining progress to date. So far, work has been undertaken on careers promotion via a range of fora, including the launch of the Tourism Insight online programme which is aimed at promoting careers in tourism and hospitality with particular reference to transition year and Youthreach participants. The NCCA has recently published a draft new specification for Junior Certificate Home Economics which has a strong emphasis on culinary skills and retains the cookery examination component. Earlier in the year, the group participated in a dedicated focus group with the NCCA on the new specification. Audits of both higher and further education facilities and courses are underway. A Restaurant and Hospitality Skillnet has been established which aims to address key skills requirements of restaurants and catering companies to help drive the domestic hospitality sector, employment growth, talent attraction and retention. Funded through the National Training Fund by my Department, the network plans to design tailored programmes covering all aspects of the restaurant, food and beverage industry to SMEs nationally with a particular focus on career progression for those at lower skilled levels to help fill anticipated job openings and increase retention levels within the sector and is well placed to address key recommendations of the EGFSN 2015 Report.

Earlier 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 to provide for the needs of all sectors, including hospitality and tourism. Last month saw the opening of the Apprenticeship Council's second call to employers for proposals for new apprenticeship programmes, where we are targeting areas such as the hospitality sector, where apprenticeships have not traditionally existed, so as to offer robust new career pathways and options to at least 20% of school leavers. The call is a key action in the plan to double the number of annual apprenticeship and traineeship registrations in 120 different schemes so that by 2020, 50,000 people will be registered on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes.

Work is nearing completion on development of the new Commis Chef Apprenticeship led by the Irish Hotels Federation and the Restaurants Association of Ireland working with Kerry Education and Training Board which is planned to commence later this year. The Apprenticeship Council has also approved development funding for a separate proposal to develop a Chef de Partie Apprenticeship. The Council will continue to work with the proposers of these new programmes to develop them into sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis. The funding for planned and forecast expansion in 2017 will see an additional

€20million provided.

In 2015 a new career traineeship programme was initiated by SOLAS in collaboration with the ETBs and enterprise to develop a more effective model of work-based learning, primarily at NFQ levels 4 and 5, incorporating best national and international research and practice. Networks have been created to facilitate partnerships between ETBs and employers to identify training needs, design training programmes, recruit learners and deliver training on and off the job. The career traineeship model of work-based learning is currently being piloted with the hospitality and engineering sectors, with the involvement of seven ETBs.

To date four Career Traineeship programmes have been completed in Hospitality. Circa 10 new Hospitality Career Traineeship programmes are planned for development/delivery by the ETBs in 2017.

In April, the National Skills Council and nine Regional Skills Fora were established - both of which are key elements of the new skills architecture as set out in the National Skills Strategy 2025. Working together with Government Departments and agencies along with education and training providers, the work of the Council and fora, will ensure that we can anticipate and respond to current, future and rapidly changing skills needs across all sectors, including hospitality.

Further Education and Training Programmes

577. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the body or agency that is responsible for tourism and hospitality training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28285/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): My Department has overall responsibility for policy development for education and training provision across the economy including the tourism and hospitality sector. Higher education provision is funded by Higher Education Authority and further education and training provision is planned and funded by SOLAS and the 16 Education and Training Boards.

Further Education and Training Programmes Eligibility

578. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if persons that are not full-time unemployed can access and participate in ETB courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28287/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Persons that are not fulltime unemployed can access and participate in ETB courses. However, priority for participation on some Further Education and Training (FET) training courses is given to unemployed persons, particularly persons in receipt of a jobseeker's payment from the Department of Social Protection. Programmes are also provided for school leavers and other groups.

Persons in full or part-time employment may participate on the Back to Education Initiative or part time basic adult education courses. They may also attend evening courses in FET Colleges and ETB Training Centres on a fee paying basis. Information on FET courses is available on the newly launched website www.fetchcourses.ie. There is also the option to undertake online training with eCollege which is available at www.eCollege.ie. These courses would also

be on a fee paying basis for persons who are in employment.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

579. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the additional extra funding required will be provided to fund a central activities space and staff toilets as part of the development of a new autism unit at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28292/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has approved significant funding to the school in question to provide an extension comprising two mainstream classrooms and a two class ASD Unit. This additional permanent accommodation will significantly enhance the school's accommodation.

My Department considers that the accommodation already approved is sufficient to cater for the school's accommodation needs and is not in a position to consider the request for the additional accommodation sought. The school has been advised of the Department's decision.

National Educational Psychological Service

580. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a psychological assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28333/17]

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

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. I have made enquiries in the matter and it is my understanding that the school have consulted with their NEPS psychologist and interventions have been put in place.

If the parents of the child in question have specific concerns in relation to the effectiveness of the interventions already in place it is advised that they raise them, in the first instance, with the principal of the school concerned with a view to that principal discussing the appropriateness or otherwise of an educational assessment with the assigned NEPS psychologist or local service.

Third Level Staff Data

581. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the academic and non-academic staff employed in all universities, higher education authority designated colleges and the institutes of technology during the periods December 2014, December 2015 and December 2016 respectively in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28395/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the Deputy is outlined in the following table.

Details of academic and non-academic staffing

-	-	Dec-14	Dec-15	Dec-16
Universities and other colleges	Academic Staff	7792.51	7995.89	8367.35
	Non-Academic Staff	7067.98	7220	7402.08
Institutes of Technology	Academic Staff	4914.38	5005.65	5062.29
	Non-Academic Staff	3301.02	3301.42	3341.94

Language Schools

582. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the working conditions of English language teachers (details supplied); if he plans to legislate for their rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28471/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract, and issues relating to working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department. If teachers working in the English language sector have a concern about their terms and conditions of employment they should contact the National Employment Rights Authority in this regard.

The regulations governing ACELS (Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services), which is operated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on a voluntary basis, and the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), which is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department, specify a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers.

Going forward, Government policy for the international education sector is the International Education Mark (IEM). Legislative amendments are necessary to facilitate the introduction of the IEM. These amendments are contained in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. The General Scheme of the Bill was approved by Government at the Cabinet meeting on 9th May 2017 and has now been referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny. It is the intention that the regulations governing the IEM will include a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers seeking to access the Mark. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill will also provide QQI with powers to examine the bona fides of a provider in the round, including English language providers seeking to access the IEM.

Cóiríocht Scoile

583. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an dtabharfaidh sé soiléiriú maidir le stádas an iarratais atá déanta ag scoil (sonraí leis seo); an bhfuil cinneadh déanta ina leith; mura bhfuil, cén uair a bheidh cinneadh déanta; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [28492/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Cheadaigh mo Roinn deontas cineachta suntasach i Meán Fómhair 2014 don scoil i dtrácht le haghaidh leathnú buan agus oibreacha athchumraíochta trína ndéanfaí gach cóiríocht réamhdhéanta a bhaint de láithreán na scoile.

Le déanaí, fuair mo Roinn togra le haghaidh méadú ar na hoibreacha sin, a chosnódh i bhfad níos mó airgid. D'iarr mo Roinn soiléiriú ar na costais agus déanfar an scéal a bhreithniú tuilleadh nuair a bheidh na costais sin againn.

Education and Training Boards Staff

584. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons employed by Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board are being offered contracts of indefinite duration on an annualised salary and are being asked to make a retrospective pension contribution despite being previously informed that they have no pension entitlement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28495/17]

585. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that staff at Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board being offered contracts of indefinite duration on a new annualised income are being disadvantaged in respect to social welfare entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28496/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The matters referred to by the Deputy are employment issues between the employees concerned and their employer, Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board. The employees concerned should raise the matters with their employer in the first instance. Officials in my Department are available to advise the employer if required to do so.

School Accommodation Provision

586. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to an application for funding from a school (details supplied) in County Waterford for the replacement of two prefab buildings; if his attention has been further drawn to health and safety concerns regarding the use of these prefabs; if the school will get the capital funding to replace same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28498/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, it is my intention in accordance with the Programme for Government to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established, over the lifetime of my Department's capital programme (2016-2021). To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school.

When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

It is intended that this assessment, when finalised, will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019. A funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 for this initiative in the programme.

School Fees

587. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the welcome ban on enrolment applications fees in the forthcoming Admissions to School Bill 2016 will consequentially require a significant increase in capitation payments to schools; and if his Department has estimated the amount of funding schools on average and in aggregate will lose out on as a result of this ban. [28501/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Apart from those recognised fee-charging second level schools, recognised primary and post primary schools are precluded from charging school fees. No charge may be made, in respect of instruction in any subject of the school curriculum or for recreation or other activities where all pupils are expected to take part.

However, it is permissible for a school to seek payments in respect of extra-curricular activities provided such activities are not obligatory and individual pupils can choose whether or not to participate. My Department's Circular 0065/2010 clarifies certain charges that may be legitimately requested from pupils.

As the Deputy is aware the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016, which was published on 6th July 2016 and will shortly proceed to Committee Stage, contains a provision prohibiting the charging of fees or seeking payment or contributions for an application for admission to a school or for the enrolment or continued enrolment of a student in a school.

The Action Plan for Education is aimed at making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026. This plan, which incorporates my Department's Strategy Statement as well as the Action Plan of Education outlines hundreds of actions, including publication and commencement of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016, to be implemented across 2016-2019.

Another one of the actions as part of the plan is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by restoring capitation funding over a three-year period as resources permit.

School Enrolments

588. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there is merit in amending the Education Act 1998 to give the Minister powers to designate areas in which centrally operated, State-administered school enrolment system could operate as suggested by a person (details supplied). [28502/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill was published on 6 July 2016 and will shortly proceed to Committee Stage. Publication of the Bill reflects the commitment in the Programme for Government to publish new School Admissions legislation taking account of current draft proposals and addressing issues including publication of school enrolment policies, an end to waiting lists, introduction of annual enrolment structures, and transparency and fairness in admissions

for pupils and their parents.

The Bill proposes to amend the Education 1998 to provide an over-arching framework for greater transparency and fairness in school enrolment generally and thereby give greater confidence to parents that the admission criteria laid down by schools and the procedures used by them are legitimate, reasonable and fair.

The provisions of the Bill should make it easier for parents to more easily access local schools and to enrol their children in a school that meets their needs.

The Bill will require schools to be fair and transparent in deciding how to prioritise children for admission to the school.

Section 65 of the Bill provides for the Minister to direct schools to cooperate with other in relation to the admission processes of the schools concerned.

Special Educational Needs Staff

589. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of special needs assistants for a school (details supplied) for the school year 2017/2018; and if he has satisfied himself that adequate provision is being made available to meet the needs of all the children with learning difficulties attending the school. [28553/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided to assist recognised schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

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

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

The level of SNA support allocated to schools can change from year to year, as students with care needs leave the school, as new students with care needs enrol, or as students develop more independent living skills as they get older and their care needs diminish over time.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year by 6th April 2017. The NCSE continues to process applications for access to SNA support which are received after the April deadline. Such applications will be processed in the order in which the applications are received. Schools will be advised shortly of their SNA allocations for the 2017/18 school year.

Where a school wishes to appeal the SNA support allocation which has been made to them,

they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Schools Building Projects Status

590. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a permanent extension for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28559/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2b - Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of Tender Documents. All statutory approvals have been obtained.

My Department issued comments to the Board of Management on 7th February and has requested confirmation from the Board that a lease for the new school site has been finalised between the Patron body and the land owner. Confirmation that the lease has been secured will be required before stage 2(b) can be fully approved. Upon receipt of this confirmation my Department will then revert to the Board of Management with regard to further progression of the project.

Special Educational Needs Staff

591. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of support teaching hours from September 2017 and for 2018 for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28563/17]

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

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

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

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

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

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educa-

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

No school, including the school to which the Deputy has referred, will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

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

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

In relation to the particular school referred to by the Deputy, this school had a Learning Support allocation of 15 hours for the 2016/17 school year, which combined with 31.03 resource teaching hours allocated to the school by the National Council for Special Education, gave a total allocation to the school of 46.03 additional teaching hours for the 2016/17 school year.

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

The special education teaching allocation for this school for 2017/18 is 46.03 hours.

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

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

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

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

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

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

there are newly enrolling pupils to the school.

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

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

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

The NCSE published details of an appeals process on the NCSE website: www.ncse.ie whereby schools could appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

Schools who wished to appeal were asked to submit appeals March 31st 2017.

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

In advance of the submission of an appeal, schools were asked to read carefully the DES circulars and in particular the relevant section, which relate to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

The NCSE will advise schools of the outcome of the appeals as soon as possible. The NCSE has confirmed, however, that the school referred to in this question has not submitted an appeal.

The model will also allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's 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.

The model will allow for some additional provision for Developing schools or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior, beyond what would be expected through normal demographic growth, prior to the next review of the model. The DES is currently developing the criteria in this regard and schools will be notified of the qualifying criteria for this in the coming weeks.

The model will also allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or emergency circumstances arising over the course of the model. The NCSE, through its regional support services, 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 consideration be given to 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 have also now been published and are available on my 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.

Teaching Qualifications

592. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of out of field mathematics and science teachers at junior cycle and senior cycle level. [28580/17]

593. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of post primary teachers in science or maths subjects that do not hold a graduate qualification; the number that do not hold a graduate qualification in a science or maths subject; the number that hold a graduate qualification in a science or maths subject; and the number that hold a post graduate qualification in a science or maths subject. [28581/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 592 and 593 together.

The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24 of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

In accordance with my Department's Circular 31/2011, each person appointed to a teaching post must, as far as possible, be registered with the Teaching Council, and have qualifications appropriate to the sector and suitable to the post for which s/he is to be employed. Schools/ETBs do not report to my Department on the qualifications of teachers employed by them. Accordingly, my Department does not have the information the Deputy is seeking.

The Deputy should note that, under Section 30 of the Teaching Council Acts, other than in limited circumstances, teachers are required to be registered with the Council in order to receive a state funded salary.

School Curriculum

594. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the percentage of secondary schools that do not offer physics or chemistry as a subject; and the percentage of secondary schools not offering these subjects according to whether they are mixed, girls and boys schools. [28582/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): At Leaving Certificate level, students may undertake Physics, Chemistry or a combined Physics & Chemistry subject. The Physics & Chemistry syllabus is a discrete syllabus and students presenting for this subject in the Leaving Certificate examination may not present for either of the individual syllabuses, Leaving Certificate Physics or Leaving Certificate Chemistry.

Of the 711 post primary schools, 73 (representing just over 10% of Post Primary Schools) do not offer any of these three subjects. Of these 73 schools, 68 are mixed, 3 are girls only and 2 are boys only.

It is a matter for schools to decide what examinable subjects they will offer at leaving cer-

tificate in addition to the required subjects of English, Irish and Mathematics.

School Curriculum

595. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the new primary school mathematics curriculum will be made available to teachers; and the timeframe it is expected to commence being taught. [28583/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Development of the Primary Mathematics curriculum which includes computational thinking, creative thinking skills and coding, for Junior Infants to 2nd Class, is underway by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Consultation on the draft curriculum is due to take place in autumn 2017 with a finalised curriculum expected to be received in my Department in September 2018. Implementation in schools will commence in September 2019 following extensive teacher professional development. It is intended that implementation of the curriculum for pupils in 3rd to 6th classes will take place the following year.

Teaching Council of Ireland

596. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the advice that has been given to his Department from the Teaching Council on the leaving certificate grades required for entry into initial teacher education programmes. [28584/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council was asked to provide advice to my Department on a number of matters relating to entry to initial teacher education (ITE), including the minimum leaving certificate grades required for entry to primary ITE programmes.

The Council engaged in a consultation process with stakeholders. Many of the issues identified were complex and the ESRI was subsequently commissioned by the Council to carry research to inform its deliberations. The ESRI report was published in November 2016.

The Council has submitted its advice, which is currently being considered by my Department. The Action Plan for Education for 2017 contains a commitment to publish revised entry requirements for initial teacher education, which I intend doing shortly, having regard, inter alia, to the advice of the Council.

Education Policy

597. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the proposal to appoint a teacher as a STEM champion in each primary school; if his Department has made advances on this proposal; and the estimates of the costs of the initiative. [28585/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The promotion of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) within our education system is a key priority for my and is reflected in multiple strategy documents, such as the Action Plan for Education, the National Skills Strategy and the Digital Strategy for Schools. My Department is already actively engaged in promoting STEM across the education system, for example through the updating of existing STEM curricula and in working with outside organisations to promote STEM among all learners.

The Report on STEM Education (STEM Report), published by the STEM Education Review Group in October 2016, has highlighted a range of recommendations. Of the 47 recommendations set out in the Report I accepted 21 as priority actions at the time the report was launched. One of those priority actions was to publish a STEM Policy Statement and Implementation Plan in 2017.

Work on development of the STEM Education Policy Statement and implementation Plan is underway. Consultations to gather the views of a wide range of stakeholders on proposed actions and how these might best be implemented within the system are coming to a close.

Analysis of the consultations findings and drafting of the Policy Statement are underway. The proposal in the STEM Report relating to STEM champions in primary schools is being considered as part of the development of the STEM Education Policy Statement and Implementation Plan which will be published soon.

English Language Training Organisations

598. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet with representatives of a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28589/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract, and issues relating to working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department. If teachers working in the English language sector have a concern about their terms and conditions of employment they should contact the National Employment Rights Authority in this regard. This has been previously communicated to the group referred to by the Deputy.

The regulations governing ACELS (Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services), which is operated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland on a voluntary basis, and the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), which is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department, specify a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers.

Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

599. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding differing levels of pay between SNAs at primary school level and at secondary school level respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28595/17]

601. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for salary and working hours disparity between primary school SNAs and secondary school SNAs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28597/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 599 and 601 together.

All Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are paid on the SNA salary scale which is set by the Minister for Education and Skills in conjunction with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. SNAs who are employed in a regular part-time capacity are paid a pro-rata amount

dependent upon their level of hours of employment. Part-time SNAs are paid on the agreed divisor rate for pay purposes for part-time SNAs which is 32 hours. The current salary scales for Special Needs Assistants are set out Department of Education and Skills circular 0022/2017 'REVISION OF SALARIES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS (SNAs) WITH EFFECT FROM 1 APRIL 2017'.

The position on working hours for SNAs is that there are no nationally set working hours for full-time SNAs. In this regard, the contractual position in respect of the working hours of SNAs is as outlined in their contracts of employment which were agreed with the school management authorities and the relevant Trade Unions representing SNAs (IMPACT and SIPTU) prior to their introduction in 2005. The working week for SNAs is defined in paragraph 2.5 of their contract as follows: "You will be required to work normal classroom hours including class break periods and in addition to attend before and after school in order to help with the preparation and tidying up of classrooms, reception and dispersal of children etc. The hours of work will normally be from [xxxx] to [xxxx] daily during term time." This standard contract has been designed to be flexible to cater for the different spectrum of working hours across all the various schools including primary, post-primary and special schools. No set hours were agreed but instead, full-time SNAs are expected to work for the normal school hours in the school that they are working in, and in addition to be available for a period of time before and after school in order to help with reception and dispersal of children and preparation and tidying up of classrooms etc. These times are set locally by the school management and will vary from school to school depending on the requirements of the school. In addition, all SNAs were required to be available for a number of days at the start and finish of each school term not exceeding 12 in total. Under the Croke Park Agreement it was agreed to introduce greater flexibility to the use of these 12 days. These 12 days now equate to 72 hours (pro-rata for part-time SNAs) to be used by schools as an additional bank of hours to be utilised and delivered outside of normal school opening hours and/or the normal school year.

Furthermore, the contract of employment for SNAs in the post primary sector specifically requires that SNAs in the post primary sector are required to work the month of June.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

600. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for secondary school SNAs' working during the month of June in view of the fact that only State exams are taking place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28596/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The contract for Special Needs Assistants in the post primary sector (link below) specifically requires that SNAs are required to work the month of June on examinations and work appropriate to the grade including training. This was agreed with the Unions representing SNAs (IMPACT and SIPTU) when the contract was devised in 2005. This condition of service places a clear onus and obligation on the SNA to attend at their place of work and be available for work during the month of June.

It is a matter for school management as their employer to determine the precise work that is to be completed by SNAs during the month of June. The utilisation of this period is not specifically for examinations or training purposes only, although these are two of the purposes for which the period of work can be utilised.

Link to the SNA Contract of Employment for the Post Primary sector:

Department of Education and Skills Circular SNA 12/05 (Post-Primary) <http://www.educa->

tion.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/sna12_05.pdf

This contract of employment is augmented by all of the relevant Departmental Circulars governing Special Needs Assistants which detail the standardised terms and conditions of employment for SNAs. These Circulars are amended and new Circulars are issued by the Minister for Education and Skills from time to time.

Question No. 601 answered with Question No. 599.

Special Educational Needs Data

602. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students on waiting lists for ASD classes in primary schools in County Wexford, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28598/17]

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.

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

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

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

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

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

- S/he has ASD, and that
- 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.

There are currently 1,152 special classes, 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 the Department that it intends to establish an additional 157 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year increasing the number of ASD Special Classes by 18% from 888 to 1,045. This will include 19 new ASD early intervention classes, 96 new primary ASD classes and 42 new post-primary ASD 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.

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in the child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

In relation to County Wexford the NCSE has advised that there are currently 5 ASD early intervention classes, 20 primary ASD classes and 11 post-primary ASD classes.

The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 6 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year in County Wexford including 1 new ASD early intervention classes, 3 new primary ASD classes and 2 new post-primary ASD classes.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools.

However, parents of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department's website www.education.ie.

School Staff

603. Deputy Pearse Doherty asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce staffing levels at a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; if a staffing appeal has been received by his Department from authorities at the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28604/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The

staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

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

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its April 2017 meeting under the small school criterion. The appeal was provisionally approved by the Appeals Board pending confirmation of the actual enrolments in September 2017. The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Schools Building Projects Status

604. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the construction programme a school (details supplied) is on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28617/17]

605. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the organisation that will build a new school (details supplied); the status of this school's relationship with Kildare and Wicklow education and training board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28618/17]

606. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the options available to a school (details supplied) in June 2019 in view of the fact that they will be unable to manage their numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28619/17]

608. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No.203 of 23 May 2017, the timeframe for the new build for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28632/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 604 to 606, inclusive, and 608 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that a permanent accommodation solution for the school to which he refers, has been identified. My Department will be in contact with the school authority in this regard in due course. Due to the sensitivity of the position, my Department is unable to comment further at this time. It is my Department's intention to progress a building project for the school in the context of my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme. Once the permanent accommodation solution has been finalised, a timeframe for delivery of the project will be set out. *Question No. 607 withdrawn. Question No. 608 answered with Question No. 604.*

Departmental Data

609. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the file of a person (details supplied) has been mislaid by his Department; if he will ensure that his officials recover the file as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28638/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department maintains about 120,000 files in its payroll section. Following a thorough search by the section I can

confirm that the file referred to has now been located and copies of the relevant documents have been forwarded to the person referred to by the Deputy.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

610. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28667/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My officials are in the process of collating the data sought by the Deputy and will respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

School Accommodation Provision

611. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) can expect to be assessed in conjunction with an application for funding for a link corridor for connectivity between school buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28682/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

School Guidance Counsellors

612. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if teaching hours will be ring-fenced for career guidance in post-primary schools from the commencement of the 2017/2018 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28686/17]

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

It has been made clear that all these 400 posts are allocated separately and transparently on the schedule of posts. It is also clearly outlined in the circulars governing staffing arrangements and in all of my Department's communications with schools and with management bodies.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, my Department is carrying out a survey of schools to obtain comprehensive information on how they use the guidance posts allocated to them. The results of this survey will be used to ensure compliance with Department circulars and inform future policy in this area.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

613. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason his Department has refused to provide a specialised autism unit for a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that the school has a number of pupils with autism enrolled in the school and has the capacity within its current school building for a specialised unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28687/17]

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

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

This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force

on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and the NCSE's policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

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

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

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

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

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

- S/he has ASD, and that
- 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.

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.

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,152 across the country now, of which 888 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 157 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year increasing the number of ASD Special Classes by 18% from 888 to 1,045.

The NCSE has not currently identified the need to establish an ASD special class in the area referred to by the Deputy.

However, this process is ongoing, and should the NCSE identify the requirement for additional special class placements in the area it will approach all schools in relation to establishing an ASD special class.

My Department will continue to support the NCSE in opening ASD special classes in areas where there is an identified need.

School Transport Provision

614. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding school transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28697/17]

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.

Changes to the eligibility criteria for this Scheme were announced in December 2010 as part of measures contained in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations contained in the Value for Money review of the scheme. In general, these changes mean that children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

This 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 are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of terms and conditions that are detailed in the scheme.

It is important that the terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Cóiríocht Scoile

615. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a cheadófar cóiríocht shealadach do scoil (sonraí tugtha) a bheidh riachtanach an fhad a bheidh síneadh á chur léi agus athchóiriú á dhéanamh ar an scoil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [28802/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is mian liom a chur in iúl don Teachta nach bhfuil aon taifead ag mo Roinn faoi iarratas do chóiríocht shealadach a bheidh faighte don scoil atá i gceist.

Más mian leis an scoil iarratas a chur isteach déanfar é a mheas agus déanfar cinneadh a eisiúint go dtí údarás na scoile chomh luath agus is féidir.

Question Heading for question(s) 616

616. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a site (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28841/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is aware that the Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board is in discussion with the owner of the property in question in the context of securing access to the building for further education purposes.

Apprenticeship Data

617. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the figures for the throughput of apprentices annually in each of the years 1990 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of apprentices in phases two, four and six annually by trade sector, for example, construction, electrical, engineering, motor and printing and paper. [28851/17]

633. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship training places at phase two that are undertaken directly by SOLAS; the number that are sub contracted to private providers; and the comparative figures for 2008. [28900/17]

634. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship training places at phases four and six that are undertaken directly by institutes of technology; the number that are subcontracted to private providers; and the comparative figures for 2008. [28901/17]

635. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce subcontracting of apprenticeship training provision to private providers; and his views on whether this is a desirable policy goal. [28902/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 617 and 633 to 635, inclusive, together.

The information sought by the Deputy will be forwarded to him.

SOLAS does not directly undertake training. However, as co-ordinating provider, SOLAS manages provision, in consultation with the HEA, which is delivered through the network of Education and Training Boards and the Institutes of Technology.

I understand that, with the exception of the farriery apprenticeship, in which an element of the training is provided by the Irish Farriery School, craft apprenticeship training is not sub-contracted to private providers.

Apprenticeship Data

618. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of certificates issued to apprentices in the construction and electrical trade sectors that reached the standard in each of the years 2010 to 2016. [28852/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of certificates issued to apprentices in the construction and electrical sectors is set out in the attached table.

Certificates issued 2010 - 2016

Sector	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Grand Total
Construction	1743	1766	1360	826	463	314	243	6715
Electrical	1044	1054	1056	710	469	353	362	5048
Grand Total	2787	2820	2416	1536	932	667	605	11763

Apprenticeship Data

619. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of employers in the construction and electrical sectors that FÁS and SOLAS have approved as competent train apprentices in each of the years 1998 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [28853/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I understand from SOLAS that 14,688 employers were approved to train apprentices in the construction and electrical sectors over the period from 1998 to 2017. It should be noted that some employers may have been approved for multiple crafts.

Apprenticeship Data

620. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new applications SOLAS has received from employers since January 2015 to date in 2017 for approval to competently train apprentices. [28854/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I understand from SOLAS that 1,929 employers were approved to train apprentices in the period 2015 to 2017. It should be noted that some employers may have been approved for multiple crafts.

Apprenticeship Programmes

621. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department or another body under its aegis are currently considering proposals to varying the length of apprenticeship based on learning outcomes determined by the trade standards and on the prior learning of the applicant; and his views on the recommendation of his Department's Apprenticeship Review – Background Issues Paper published in 2013. [28855/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In 2015 SOLAS, in accordance with Quality and Qualifications Ireland requirements, conducted programme and standards review in consultation, with all relevant stakeholders, in 23 of the 27 existing craft apprenticeship programmes. Each stakeholder programme review group was assigned a standardised terms of reference which included a requirement to consider the duration of the respective apprenticeship programmes in line with programme standards and learning outcomes. None of the programme review groups recommended changing the duration of the apprenticeship programmes. In relation to the existing craft apprenticeship programmes SOLAS and its predecessor FÁS have provided for recognition of prior learning since 2002.

New apprenticeship programmes are of varying durations, subject to a minimum of 2 years.

School Accommodation Provision

622. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the anticipated increase of prefab accommodation for schools; the cost of the increase; the way in which the tendering process operates; the person or body with which the responsibility rests, if the cost of permanent classrooms reflects the expense of deploying the temporary classrooms; and if the budget allocated for new schools is constrained as a result. [28872/17]

623. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the names of all companies which are providing temporary classrooms on a national basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28873/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 622 and 623 together.

My Department's policy on renting prefab accommodation in individual cases depends on a number of factors. If the accommodation need is deemed short term, the policy is generally to approve temporary rental of accommodation. For example, a school may require a temporary building while it is awaiting the completion of construction of a permanent building. In some cases, a school may need accommodation at very short notice and this can only be provided through temporary accommodation.

Generally, a school procures its temporary accommodation by obtaining at least three quotes for prefab providers. The contract is between the school authority and the provider. Where a building project is involved and a temporary decant is necessary, prefab procurement is likely to form part of the tender process for the building project itself and the responsibility will rest with whoever is delivering the project.

Where the need for additional accommodation is likely to be for a period of more than three years, the school is given grant aid to construct a permanent structure.

It is not possible to say what the level of demand will be for temporary accommodation as this is on a case by case basis depending on the particular circumstances of individual schools as outlined. The level of demand for capital funding to meet demographic needs continues to be such that it would not be possible to provide funding for permanent accommodation for all the needs at the same time, nor would it be possible to meet any immediate needs that arise by approving permanent accommodation as a solution due to the design, statutory processes and procurement stages involved.

Similar to permanent accommodation, the cost of providing temporary accommodation for a school is site specific and is subject to individual site conditions, planning permission conditions and Fire Officer and Disability Access Certificate conditions. The cost of individual projects can only effectively be known when a project has been fully designed, has been through the planning permission processes and has been tendered.

The provision of rented accommodation does not compromise my Department's capital budget. Rather it ensures that school's short term needs are met as quickly as possible and that every child can have access to a physical school place.

The Deputy may wish to know that, subject to resources, it is intended to replace all purchased prefabs with permanent accommodation over the lifetime of the Department's current

capital programme, which runs from 2016 to 2021. Again, subject to resources the replacement programme is likely to commence in 2019. Prefab Replacement Schemes are not, however, the only manner by which prefabs are replaced by the Department. Prefabs are routinely replaced in schools as part of major building projects. This includes schools that were on the Department's 5-year capital Programme (2012-2016) and those that are on the Department's new 6-year Programme (2016-2021).

In regard to the names of companies providing temporary classrooms on a national basis, I will arrange for this information to be forwarded directly to the Deputy.

School Transport Review

624. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the review of the school transport appeals system; when the review will conclude; the terms of reference of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28875/17]

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 Programme for Government commits to a review of the criteria and guidelines for the School Transport Appeals Board. The review is underway and is focussed on the criteria and guidelines for the Appeals Board as they apply in the primary and post primary school transport scheme and the scheme for children with special educational needs.

The review is expected to be completed shortly.

Youth Employment Initiative

625. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the information technology systems required to apply for funding under the youth employment initiative have been developed; the steps required and the timelines in terms of compliance with the requirements of the establishment of systems for the successful drawdown of money under the initiative; the status of the implementation of these requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28876/17]

626. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual funding allocated by his Department to projects under the youth employment initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28877/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 625 and 626 together.

The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is integrated into European Social Fund (ESF) programming as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020 (PEIL) that was adopted by Commission Decision in February 2015. The specific YEI allocation for Ireland of €68m (for 2014-15) is matched by equal amounts from our ESF allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m. Sev-

en specific activities were selected for YEI funding namely the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance; JobBridge; Jobsplus Incentive Scheme; Tús; Youthreach, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Momentum.

In accordance with the Regulations governing the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF, including the ESF and the YEI), the relevant managing and certifying authorities for the Operational Programme must be designated, based on the opinion of an independent audit body which must be satisfied across a range of criteria that systems are in place to allow the authorities to perform their required functions, prior to the making of any application for an interim payment under the Regulations. The systems designation requirements include the provision of a computerised accounting and information system for EU funds to meet the 2014-2020 functionality requirements. The Regulations require Member States to ensure that all exchanges of information between beneficiaries and the relevant authorities and intermediate bodies can be carried out by means of electronic data exchange systems (known as E-Cohesion). These systems will facilitate interoperability with national and Union frameworks and allow for the beneficiaries to submit information only once.

The EU Commission has agreed an interim arrangement whereby claims, including YEI, for the 2014 – 2020 ESIF Operational Programmes can be made using the ICT system originally developed for the 2007 – 2013 Operational Programme, with minor modifications, which have been successfully implemented. A more comprehensive ICT system (known as e-Cohesion) is in development and will be available for claims from September 2017 onwards.

The ESF Managing Authority is currently finalising its material for transmission to the independent audit body to facilitate designation of the relevant ESF authorities.

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

While no payment application has been made to the EU Commission to date in respect of the YEI or the ESF, the EU Regulations allow for the 2014/15 allocations to be spent and claimed before the end of 2018. The activities are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer and it is expected that the funding will be fully drawn down.

English Language Training Organisations

627. Deputy Catherine Murphy asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet or engage with representatives of English language teachers (details supplied) regarding employment legislation and working conditions for English language teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28881/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract, and issues relating to working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department. If teachers working in the English language sector have a concern about their terms and conditions of employment they should contact the National Employment Rights Authority in this regard. This has been previously communicated to the group referred to by the Deputy.

The regulations governing ACELS (Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services), which is operated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland on a voluntary basis, and the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), which is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department, specify a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers.

Apprenticeship Programmes

628. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether due to the high waiting lists for phase two and phase 4 and 6 training places for apprentices especially in construction and electrical his Department is now effectively operating a capacity limited model of apprenticeship recruitment, which was suggested by a review in 2013 carried out by his Department (details supplied). [28887/17]

629. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there are capacity constraints holding back the training of apprentices here, especially in the electrical and construction sectors and that this is reflected in the high waiting lists for training places at phases two, four and six which has led to a reluctance and inability of employers to register more new apprentices in these sectors. [28896/17]

630. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether mistakes were made in the 2013 to 2016 period by SOLAS, the HEA and his Department in forecasting the demand for new apprenticeships in 2016 and 2017 and as a result the training places were not put in place to enable the throughput of more apprentices to match demand in the construction sector. [28897/17]

631. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new measures and changes his Department has undertaken since 2013 to enhance the control of recruitment and to smooth capacity planning of apprenticeships. [28898/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):
I propose to take Questions Nos. 628 to 631, inclusive, together.

SOLAS does not operate a capacity model in the managing of the provision of the existing craft apprenticeship programmes. As the Deputy is aware apprenticeship is a demand driven alternate educational and training programme and the allocation of provision is determined by the skill demands of employers.

SOLAS, through its Skills and Labour Market and Research Unit (SLMRU) and its Apprenticeship Services Unit, regularly conducts forecasts of apprenticeship requirements. The SLMRU has developed a comprehensive methodology to generate annual five-year forecasts of apprentice intake for construction trades. The forecasts are revised annually and are due to be updated later this year. The methodology takes account of output forecasts, in money terms, for various segments of the construction industry, the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) and the relationship between apprentice intake and employment trends in the sectors.

Forecasts are used by both SOLAS and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for planning purposes and, where apprenticeship registrations are particularly strong, provision is allocated strategically on a nationwide basis. The forecasts for registrations in the craft apprenticeship programmes remain strong and I am confident that there is effective capacity planning for apprenticeship programmes.

SOLAS works closely with my Department in managing apprenticeship provision. Since 2015 the Department has allocated additional apprenticeship instructor posts to SOLAS for dissemination across the Education and Training Board network. SOLAS has allocated over half of these additional posts as electrical instructor posts to ensure provision is matched with demand. Furthermore, a number of ETBs are in the process of introducing new facilities to meet the increased demand in the construction and electrical sectors. While labour market trends remain difficult to predict in a rapidly changing labour market, SOLAS is satisfied that with this additional provision being put in place there will be sufficient provision to meet the current and expected demands from the construction and electrical sectors.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes Administration

632. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are sectors in which SOLAS sets a maximum allowable number of recruits to each trade for a set planning period; if recruitment is regulated to this figure; the sectors concerned; and the employer group which consults with SOLAS on targets for each sector. [28899/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I understand from SOLAS that they do not set any maximum number for the recruitment of apprentices to any of the craft trades. Approved employers may, however, have upper limits to the number they can recruit based on their capacity to adequately train apprentices.

Questions Nos. 633 to 635, inclusive, answered with Question No. 617.

Technological Universities

636. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the Government approved the recent agreement with the TUI in respect of the Technological Universities Bill. [28907/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I would like to take the opportunity to welcome the outcome of the TUI ballot of 13th June 2017 referred to by the Deputy.

My officials are seeking to finalise the consultation process on the TU Bill in the short-term and I will then be bringing proposals for amendments to the Bill, as published, arising as a result of the consultation with stakeholders, to Government for approval before the summer recess.

School Accommodation Provision

637. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding two applications (details supplied) made to his Department. [28922/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application from the school referred for significant additional accommodation including general classrooms, specialist rooms, ancillary accommodation and an ASD Unit.

My Department is currently considering the application and will be in contact with the school authority shortly on the matter.

School Management

638. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body which ran a school (details supplied); the body which funded it; the way in which referrals were made; the organisation that inspected and oversaw it; and the courses that were taught in the school. [28926/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was under the management of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul until it closed on the 31st August 1987. The school was established as a recognised special school in accordance with Rule 27 of the 1965 Rules for National Schools and financial assistance was provided by my Department through capitation grants and payment of teachers.

The school operated as a Residential and Day Special School for girls with special educational needs. Records held by my Department from 1985 indicate that the school catered for “mildly mentally handicapped girls”.

In accordance with the Rules for National Schools, recognised schools were inspected by my Department’s inspectorate who were required, under the Rules for National Schools, to furnish at least once in every two years a School Report on the work of every school in their district. Circular 11/76 changed the requirement of the Inspector to furnish a School Report at least once in every four years. However, Inspectors were required to undertake frequent incidental visits to the schools in their district in order to collaborate in the work of the teachers and to help young teachers and others who, in the inspector’s opinion, were in need of assistance and advice.

Rule 70 of the 1965 Rules for National Schools set out the programme of secular instruction which listed Irish, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Needlework (Girls) and Music as obligatory subjects. The publication of a new curriculum in 1971, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, encouraged the integration of subjects, both religious and ‘secular’ subjects.

Since 2005, the school is covered under the Residential Institutions Redress Act, 2002.

School management may have retained records relevant to the Deputy’s query. As the school was under the management of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, persons seeking information in relation to the school are advised to contact the Data Controller of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Seton House, Northbrook Rd, Dublin 6, Telephone 01 6687300, who may be in a position to assist with enquiries.

School Patronage

639. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has drawn up the protocols for the consultation process on the new reconfiguration of school patronage; when the consultation phase is due to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28938/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Draft protocols for the Identification Phase of the schools reconfiguration for diversity process have been drawn up and are currently under consideration. Consultation with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and with Childcare Committees Ireland in relation to administering the surveys of pre-school parents is ongoing and it is anticipated that this phase will commence in the autumn when the survey arrangements have been finalised and tested.

Junior Cycle Reform

640. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce the percentage of the marks for junior cycle oral Irish under the new framework for the junior cycle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28939/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): With effect from September 2017, junior cycle provision for Irish in post-primary schools and settings will comprise two new specifications (syllabuses). The L1 (Language 1, in Irish, Teanga 1) specification is targeted at students in Irish-medium schools and students in English-medium schools who learn one or more subjects (apart from Irish) through the medium of Irish. The L2 (Language 2, Teanga 2) specification is targeted at other students in English-medium schools.

The new Junior Cycle specifications for Irish (both L1 and L2) have a strong emphasis on oral language. This is particularly highlighted in the main strand of the specifications – Communicative Competence. This strand places an enhanced emphasis on Irish as the language of learning and communication in classrooms as well as an emphasis on the skills required to communicate effectively with other users of the language. Communication, opportunities for use and interaction are central to classroom tasks.

A different type of assessment methodology for oral language skills (and other skills) will be used in the new Junior Cycle Irish specification. Up to now, there was an optional oral language test, taken by a minority of students, and generally assessed by their teachers as part of the old Junior Certificate examination. Now, as part of the new Junior Cycle Irish specifications, the oral language skills of all students will be formally assessed. This will be done by means of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) which will be reported by schools to parents at the end of third year in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).

School Services Staff

641. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if retired school caretakers that receive a pension from his Department are also entitled to receive a State pension; if there are circumstances in which this can be the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28941/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): School caretakers generally pay full rate class A PRSI which brings with it cover for the full range of social welfare benefits, including where the eligibility criteria is satisfied, payment of State pension. The State Pension, where payable, is additional to the occupational pension where the caretaker is covered by an occupational pension scheme. For those who are members of an occupational pension, both the occupational pension contributions which they pay and the occupational pension payable on retirement are at rate that reflect the potential entitlement to State pension. The eligibility criteria for the award of State pension is entirely a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

School Costs

642. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 106 of 4 April 2017, the detail of the correspondence between his Department and the school in question; if instructions have been issued from his Department

regarding the suggestion that persons with financial difficulties should discreetly approach their school to ensure requests for voluntary contributions are not issued; if not, the reason he will not issue such an instruction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28949/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that voluntary contributions by parents are permissible provided it is made absolutely clear to parents that there is no question of compulsion to pay and that, in making a contribution, they are doing so of their own volition.

The manner in which voluntary contributions are sought and collected is a matter for school management, however their collection should be such as not to create a situation where either parents or pupils could reasonably infer that the contributions take on a compulsory character.

Following contact by a parent who raised a concern about the manner in which the school in question sought contributions, my Department wrote to the school seeking clarification from the school in relation to same. In its response, the school indicated that it has requested the company which provides its Data Management Systems to make appropriate adjustments to its online system which will in future indicate the voluntary nature of contributions.

My Department was again contacted again by the parent with a further concern following a subsequent letter issued from the school in question to parents in relation to a contribution being sought for heating and maintenance for the 2017/18 school year. My Department wrote again to the school and reminded it that all requests for contributions from parents must make clear that they are voluntary and that there is no compulsion to pay. My Department is currently awaiting a response to that letter.

The Deputy may also be aware that the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, which was published on 6th July 2016, contains a provision prohibiting the charging of fees or seeking payment or contributions for an application for admission to a school or for the enrolment or continued enrolment of a student in a school.

I also believe that schools need to be accountable to parents and we need greater levels of communication, engagement and transparency in how schools serve their communities. Better information for parents, including information in relation to the collection and use of voluntary contributions, is an issue that I will also be looking at in the context of my Department's work on a Parents' and Students' Charter.

Schools Building Projects Status

643. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of a new school building for a school (details supplied); the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28960/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Building project at the school referred to by the Deputy has completed Stage 2A - Detailed Design of the Architectural Planning process.

It became necessary during the course of the design stage to terminate the appointment of the Mechanical and Electrical engineer on this project. The tendering process for a replacement Mechanical & Electrical Engineer is nearing completion. Once the replacement Mechanical and Electrical Engineer is appointed the Design Team will then commence Stage 2B-Developed Design Stage which includes applications for all statutory consents including Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate and the preparation of ten-

der documentation.

When all statutory approvals have been secured and the school and its design team submit the stage 2(b) report, my Department will then revert to the school with regard to a timeframe for progression to tender and construction stages at that time.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

644. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the monetary value of an asset which was gained via inheritance during the reference year is seen as reckonable income in the assessment of a student grant application; the reason for this approach to inherited assets in view of the fact that additional assets not gained by inheritance are not seen as reckonable income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28962/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Article 24(6) of the Student Grant Scheme 2017 provides that gifts or inheritances received in the reference period will be included as reckonable income.

If any of the persons whose income is under consideration received a gift or an inheritance in the reference period, these are included in reckonable income, unless in the case of an independent student, the gift or inheritance was between the applicant and his or her spouse, civil partner or cohabitant; or in the case of a dependent student, the gift or inheritance was between parents or to the applicant from his or her parent(s).

I have no plans to change the current arrangements in relation to the treatment of gifts or inheritance for student grants purposes.

Teacher Training Provision

645. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of the induction workshops for newly qualified teachers for every year since it was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28970/17]

646. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a similar level of continuous professional development courses are available to teachers other than newly qualified teachers under the induction programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28971/17]

647. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to conduct a value for money review of the quality and efficiency of the workshops available to newly qualified teachers under the induction workshop programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28972/17]

648. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to consult with newly qualified teachers in terms of enhancing the quality, utility and effectiveness of workshops available to newly qualified teachers under the induction programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28973/17]

649. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is an evaluation of teacher satisfaction carried out after the workshops undertaken by newly qualified teachers under the induction programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28974/17]

650. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the content of the workshops offered to newly qualified teachers under the induction workshop programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28975/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 645 to 650, inclusive, together.

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) facilitates a Workshop Programme for newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers (NQTs). The Workshop Programme consists of a series of 14 primary and 13 post-primary workshops, facilitated by practising teachers who have received training from NIPT. It is a Teaching Council registration requirement for NQTs to participate in the Workshop Programme.

The workshops are interactive and based on practical learning experiences. Opportunities are afforded to NQTs to build on the learning experiences at Initial Teacher Education (ITE) level and to engage in professional dialogue with other NQTs, based on current learning experiences and needs. The NQT can select which workshops to attend based on their own learning needs and this provides the NQT with flexibility, offers them self-direction and empowers professional development. The topics covered by the Workshops are covered at the ITE stage from a theoretical perspective whereas the NIPT workshops adopt a more practical approach to supporting NQTs, reflecting their class-based working context during the induction year. The topics are informed by feedback from NQTs, facilitators, schools, national and international research and system needs.

The feedback and evaluations from the Workshop Programme show a very high level of satisfaction from NQTs. Over 95% of NQTs agreed or strongly agreed that the Workshop Programme is effective and that the networking opportunities arising from attendance are extremely valuable.

The current workshop programme, while it will continue to be available to NQT's following the traditional route of Probation via the Inspectorate, will be phased out over the growth phase of the new Integrated Framework of Induction, Droichead.

NIPT provides Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for practicing teachers by providing Professional Support Team (PST) Training to those engaged in the support and mentoring of NQT's under the Droichead Programme. Prior to the advent of Droichead NIPT provided initial mentor training to experienced teachers in almost 1,200 schools.

NIPT also provides training/CPD for teachers who work as part-time Associates with NIPT and for those who work as Facilitators of the workshop programme at local level in Education Centres. Other professional development is provided to experienced teachers and NQT's at shared learning days and other larger scale events.

CPD for practicing teachers is also provided by other support services, PDST, NCSE, JCT, provided by Education Centres based on local needs and also by private providers.

The costs of the workshops are not readily available in my Department. I will arrange for them to be sent directly to the Deputy.

Teaching Council of Ireland

651. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address issues raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[28996/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council is the statutory body that sets and upholds the standards for entry to the teaching profession. All initial teacher education programmes (primary, post-primary and further education) in Ireland that lead to registration must have professional accreditation from the Teaching Council. It is open to any higher institute of education to design a programme of initial teacher education and to apply to the Teaching Council to have it accredited. St Angela's College, Sligo is currently the only provider of initial teacher education for teachers of Home Economics.

Under the student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding, provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution and meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means. The handling of all student grant applications is a matter in the first instance for SUSI. Applications for grant funding should be made to www.SUSI.ie. It is important to note that the income thresholds for the student grant scheme take into consideration if there are more than four dependent children in the student's family or if more than one child in the family is attending college.

There are some other supports available to students in financial need. This includes the Student Assistance Fund which provides funding, through the access offices of third-level institutions, to assist students in exceptional financial need. The access offices themselves also provide support and advice to students to enable them to continue with their studies.

Departmental Staff Relocation

652. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29036/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not hold records of staff applying for transfers to other Departments or State Agencies.

In any case, transfers would be voluntary and there is therefore no cost incurred by the Department for members of staff re-located outside the Dublin region.

School Textbooks Rental Scheme

653. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider in the budget for 2018 increasing funding for the school book rental scheme by €15 million; if he will implement the recommendation from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection made in 2013 to introduce a five year template for the delivery of an entirely free school book scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29109/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the recommendations on school costs contained in the Joint Oireachtas Report that was published in 2013 and I wish to make clear that I strongly support any measures that can be put in place to reduce costs for parents.

School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents. My Department supports the operation of book rental schemes through the funding provided under its school books grant scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €16 million annually to all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. The arrangements in relation to this scheme are set out in Circular 0046/2013 which is published on my Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0046_2013.pdf.

In addition, €15.7 million seed capital was provided over three years to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools.

The most recent figures available indicate that 94% of primary schools and 65% of post-primary schools operate a book rental scheme.

One of the actions as part of the Action Plan for Education is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by increasing the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce/eliminate school book costs for parents as resources permit.

It was not possible to provide additional funding in Budget 2017 in relation to book rental schemes due to the many competing demands for the available funding. This commitment remains a priority for me to address as soon as possible during the lifetime of the Action Plan. However, it is important to note that there are limited funds available in Budget 2018 to meet a wide range of needs across all areas of Government.

Furthermore, my Department has published a circular to school authorities and ETBs regarding measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the costs which include the provision of a book rental scheme. The circular can be accessed on my Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032_2017.pdf.

Fund for Students with Disabilities

654. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost of expanding the eligibility to the fund for students with disabilities, the student assistance fund and the maintenance grant to part time students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29111/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) are managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of my Department.

While it is difficult to provide exact costs for future applications the HEA has estimated that the total cost of extending the scope of the Third Level Access Funds to students on part-time courses would be in the region of €2.1 million per year, assuming no other policy change, the estimated cost of SAF being approximately €1.9 million and FSD being €224,000.

Based on enrolment data for part-time students provided by the HEA the estimated cost of extending the maintenance grant to Higher Education students would be €32m per year.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

655. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of rent supplement and the one parent family

payments and jobseeker's transition payment that want to take up education or training are not eligible for SUSI maintenance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29115/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In general terms, there is nothing preventing a lone parent who is in receipt of Rent Supplement, One Parent Family Payment and/or Jobseeker's Allowance Transition payment(s) from applying to SUSI for maintenance funding under the Student Grant Scheme.

Rent Supplement, One Parent Family Payments (where paid to the applicant) and Jobseeker's Allowance Transition (where paid to the applicant), are treated as income disregards for the purposes of the Student Grant Scheme and are not included in the calculation of reckonable income.

Furthermore, the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseekers Allowance Transition payments are eligible payments for the special rate of maintenance grant.

DEIS Administration

656. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date on which the next round of DEIS status schools will be announced; and the timeframe for schools to apply for DEIS status or enhanced DEIS status; and if existing applications will be considered. [28000/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The next update of the DEIS Identification Process will take place later this year when the relevant Census 2016 and school pupil data become available for use in this process.

Schools are not required to apply for inclusion in the programme as the independent data on which assessment is based is available to my Department.

A key feature of the new DEIS identification process is its use of independent data which can be regularly updated to ensure a currency of the information on which resource allocation to schools is based.

The new Identification Process under DEIS Plan 2017, which is applied uniformly for all schools in the country across both the Primary and post Primary sectors, assesses the socio-economic background of the pupil cohort in each school using centrally held data. The Key Data Sources are the DES Primary Online Database (POD) and Post-Primary Online (PPOD) Databases and the CSO Small Area of Population Statistics (SAPs) from the National Census of Population 2011 as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (HP Index).

Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is applied uniformly to all schools in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

Schools are not required to apply for inclusion in the programme as the independent data on which assessment is based is available to my Department.

DEIS Status

657. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider

DEIS status for a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that the second school in the parish already benefits from DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28001/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

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.

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 in the country including the school referred to by the Deputy.

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.

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.

Gaeltacht Policy

658. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of implementing the policy on Gaeltacht education on a yearly basis for the next five years. [28005/17]

659. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount allocated by his Department for the implementation of the policy on Gaeltacht; and if this is factored into fiscal space projections for the next five years. [28006/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 658 and 659 together.

An annual budget of €1 million has been allocated for the implementation of my Department's Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 for 2017. While it is expected that the allocation for the implementation of the Policy will rise annually over the term of the Policy (2017 to 2022), specific allocations in the Department's estimates for 2018 and later years will be determined in the context of agreeing budgets for those years.

Funding estimates are determined annually and approved by the Dáil in accordance with normal procedures for all Government Departments.

The next Circular letter will issue in Spring 2018 setting out the range of actions that will be implemented and supports provided for 2018/2019.

DEIS Status

660. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision not to award DEIS status to a school (details supplied) can be reversed. [28832/17]

661. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the appeals process that is in place for a school that has not been awarded DEIS status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28833/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 660 and 661 together.

Schools were selected for inclusion in DEIS on the basis of their identified level of disadvantage which was determined by the DEIS Identification Process using centrally held data available to my Department. Through this process a school was identified as having a concentrated level of disadvantage to be eligible for inclusion in DEIS. Therefore the question of reversing a decision does not arise as it is underpinned by data which shows the demographic of each school.

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-/>

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.

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.

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.

A further process will take account of updated data as it becomes available. All schools are being contacted to request them to ensure that their POD/PPOD data is fully correct and up to date, including Eircode. 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.

In terms of appeal DEIS Plan 2017 provided for a verification process, aimed at ensuring the model was run correctly and the data supplied by the schools through the POD/PPOD systems was correctly used. This is currently ongoing in relation to all schools who contacted my Department requesting that their data be validated, including the school in question whose application for verification of its data is also being processed. This process is expected to be concluded shortly and schools will be informed of the results.

Following on from the update of the process later this year it is the intention of my Department to make available to all schools information relating to the identification process and their own individual school data.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

662. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the cuts to the student grant implemented in 2011 and 2012 and restore the distance of adjacent rate to 24 kilometres from the current distance of 45 kilometres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29110/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that Budget 2011 provided for a number of student grant measures which came into effect for the 2011/12 academic year, including the change in the assessment of the qualifying distance

criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant from 24 kilometres to 45 kilometres.

The 24km distance criterion was originally set in 1968 and had not been updated in more than 40 years. Since then, significant improvements have taken place in the road and rail network and it is considered that the revised distance criteria is more consistent with the type of distances that students may legitimately be expected to commute to college.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via www.studentgrantappeals.ie.

Departmental Staff Data

663. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff employed in his department and in each State agency under the aegis of his department, by county, in tabular form. [29253/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Staff in my Department by county are listed in the table - numbers are as of 31 May).

Location	Number of staff – Fulltime and Temporary listed
Co. Cork	76 Full time equivalents 50 Temporary Clerical Officers 126 Total
Co. Dublin	726.5 Full time equivalents 187 Temporary Clerical Officers 913.5 Total
Co. Limerick	68.03 Full time equivalents

Military Aircraft Landings

664. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 30 May 2017, the procedures his Department uses to grant permission for military aircraft to land in Irish territory or to fly through Irish airspace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26642/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Further to my predecessor's response to parliamentary question number 50 of 30 May 2017, the procedures in my Department for considering requests for landings by foreign military aircraft focus on ensuring that the information provided with regard to the flights and aircraft demonstrate that they comply with the applicable conditions. The Embassy of the requesting State must confirm in writing that the aircraft seeking permission to land is unarmed, carries no arms, ammunition or explosives and will not engage in intelligence gathering. Furthermore, the Embassy must confirm in writing that the flights in question do not form part of military exercises or operations. As part of the procedure for considering all requests for military aircraft to land at Irish airports, my Department also seeks the views of other agencies including: An Garda Síochána, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport prior to permission being granted.

A number of countries have applied for and been granted annual blanket clearance for overflights on the same conditions that apply to landings. Under these arrangements, the Embassy of the country concerned submits a notification of each proposed flight to my Department. My Department then notifies relevant Departments and agencies.

Overflights by US military aircraft are permitted without prior notification, on the basis that the aircraft are unarmed, carry only cargo and passengers and comply with navigational requirements. Where overflights by US military aircraft do not comply with these arrangements advance permission must be sought in respect of each overflight. The US Embassy provides my Department with post hoc monthly returns on the total number of overflights and the types of aircraft involved.

Immigration Status

665. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the time-frame for a decision on the legal status of a person (details supplied) of a child born here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26668/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): At the outset, it is important to clarify that the legal status of any non-national in the State is a matter for the Irish immigration authorities, namely the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade I am responsible for implementation of the terms of the Passports Act, 2008, which provides, *inter alia*, that a person must be an Irish citizen before a passport can be issued to him/her. In order to meet this legal requirement, each person must, therefore, demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship in his/her application. The Deputy may recall from previous correspondence that – (i) The child in question was born in Dublin in November 2015. Their entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the terms Section 6A of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956 as amended (the 1956 Act). Section 6A provides that a person born in the State on or after 1 January, 2005, where neither parent is an Irish or British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside in the State or Northern Ireland without restriction at the time of that person's birth may claim citizenship by birth in the State (and thereby establish eligibility for an Irish passport) only where a parent has been lawfully resident in the State for three years of the four preceding his/her birth; and (ii) Proofs of the lawful residence in the State are required to determine if a parent has the required three year residence. In this case, the child's mother submitted evidence lawful residence under Subsidiary Protection for the required period. At the time of my previous correspondence, my Department was seeking clarification from the Department of Justice and Equality on the child's entitlement to Irish citizenship. Specifically, these enquiries centered on whether residence under Subsidiary Protection could be reckoned for the purposes of Section 6A of the 1956 Act and how such residence should be calculated. I accept that there has been a delay in reaching a decision and this can be partly explained by legal proceedings involving the Department of Justice and Equality that featured residence under Subsidiary Protection in another case. These proceedings have concluded and officials from both Departments met last week to discuss the application or otherwise of Subsidiary Protection residence to the requirements of Section 6A of the 1956 Act. These discussions are at an advanced stage.

Prisoner Welfare

666. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will make representations to the British and Northern Irish authorities regarding prisoner issues in a prison (details supplied). [26681/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government has an ongoing interest in the humanitarian welfare of prisoners in the separated regime. The August 2010 agreement regarding certain matters in the Maghaberry Prison was a mechanism which allowed grievances to be addressed. In 2014, four independent assessors appointed by the then Northern Ireland Minister for Justice published a Stocktake report on implementation of the 2010 agreement. Some of those independent assessors had been involved in brokering the 2010 agreement. The Stocktake report stated that not all the principles of the 2010 agreement were adhered to, nor had all undertakings been acted upon. The recommendations of the Stocktake report were accepted by the then Northern Ireland Minister for Justice. One recommendation was to the Northern Ireland Office. There have been difficulties in delivery on the recommendations of the Stocktake report, which my predecessor raised with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and with the Northern Ireland Minister for Justice. These issues are also raised on an ongoing basis at official level, including by my officials in the Belfast Secretariat.

Underpinning the 2010 agreement was a commitment to uphold the safety of prison staff. The murders of two prison officers, that of David Black in 2012 and of Adrian Ismay last year, have impacted on the trust relationships within the prison and complicated the differences between prison management and those in the separated regime.

The Northern Ireland Executive's Action Plan on Paramilitarism commits to establish a review of the separated regime in Maghaberry. This is a welcome initiative which I hope would assist in moving forward issues such as movement on landings in Maghaberry, for the betterment of all, prisoners and staff. I look forward to the review being put in place once there is a new Executive up and running at Stormont.

Prison Service

667. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise with the British and Northern Irish authorities the question of whether they are committed to the August 2010 agreement regarding a prison (details supplied). [26682/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government remains committed to supporting the implementation of the August 2010 agreement at Maghaberry Prison and my predecessor raised this matter with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and with the then Northern Ireland Minister for Justice. The 2014 Stocktake report on conditions in the separated regime in Maghaberry makes clear that not all the principles agreed between prison management and prisoners in 2010 had been adhered to. Some undertakings were not acted upon and the potential of the 2010 agreement has not been fully realised. Implementation of the recommendations of the Stocktake report, which was carried out by an Independent Assessment Team, is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. My officials at the Belfast Secretariat will continue to raise with the relevant authorities the importance of moving forward on the Stocktake report. The Stocktake report recommends that separated republican prisoners be given increased access to landings, up to six prisoners at a time, in a context where prisoners who come from different republican groups agree to share all the facilities and physical space. These groups do not always work in a unitary fashion. Progress to this goal has been complicated by searches on the wing, which in turn has contributed to heightened tensions.

Differences between prison management and prisoners in the separated regime on how this recommendation might be implemented remains a challenge which has not yet been addressed.

The Government attaches particular importance to the Northern Ireland Executive's Action Plan on Paramilitarism and in particular the intention to establish a review of the separated regime in Maghaberry. This is a welcome initiative which I hope could provide a context to move forward to a more positive atmosphere within the prison. I look forward to the review being put in place once there is a new Executive up and running at Stormont.

Consular Services Provision

668. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding progress to reopen the Irish Embassy in Iran in view of the fact that Ireland is the only EU country which does not have an embassy there. [26744/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is one of six EU Member States that do not currently have resident missions in Iran. Our bilateral relationship with Iran is sustained and promoted on a concurrent basis through the Ireland's embassy in Ankara. Ireland is also represented in Iran by an Honorary Consul. The configuration and scale of the State's diplomatic network is kept under ongoing review by the Government. The Government is of course conscious of the political, economic, trade and other factors that might warrant the opening of a resident diplomatic mission in Iran – as in a number of other countries. However, resource constraints do not allow us to have resident representation in all the locations that might objectively justify it having regard to those factors.

Diplomatic Representation

669. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding facilities available for diplomats here; and the details of changes regarding same over the past number of years. [26746/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The position of foreign diplomats in the State is governed primarily by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, incorporated into Irish law by the Diplomatic Relations and Immunities Act 1967. The Convention, which enjoys almost universal ratification, provides for various privileges and immunities for diplomats and diplomatic missions, while also providing for a duty to respect the laws and regulations of the host state. Diplomats are also exempt from VAT in respect of certain purchases on a reciprocal basis pursuant to the Value-Added Tax (Refund of Tax) (No. 29) Order 1996. The Diplomatic Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which was published on the 5th of April of this year, is currently awaiting Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann. The purpose of this Bill is to enhance the efficiency, efficacy and clarity of various arrangements with respect to the staff of diplomatic missions and international organisations. To this end, the Bill proposes various amendments to the Diplomatic Relations and Immunities Act 1967 as well as to citizenship, immigration and employment permits legislation, which have been developed in consultation with the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. These amendments are largely of a minor and technical nature.

Passport Services

670. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which a person (details supplied) can obtain a passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26838/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, and as set out in the Passports Act 2008, it is only possible to issue Irish passports to Irish citizens. Entitlement to citizenship is in turn subject to the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, as amended. Accordingly, the Passport Service is obliged to seek documentary evidence of Irish citizenship by birth, parentage/descent, or naturalisation before a passport application can be processed. It is not possible to recognise a person as an Irish citizen in the absence of such evidence. As the person you have referred to is a first time applicant, the Passport Service has advised that in order for him to obtain an Irish passport he must first obtain the birth certificate of one of his Irish-born parents in order for him to prove that he is an Irish citizen. A replacement birth certificate may be obtained by writing, with the details of the Irish born parents, to the General Register Office, Government Offices, Convent Road, Roscommon, Co. Roscommon, F42 VX53. Alternatively, these may be obtained on line at : www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/General-Register-Office.aspx.

In addition to his own birth certificate and that of his Irish born parent, the Passport Service requires further documents to fully establish his identity. This information is listed on the Passport Service website at www.dfa.ie/passport.

Consular Services Staff

671. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 62 of 30 May 2017, the number of additional staff that have been deployed to embassies and consulates since 23 June 2016 to date in 2017, by embassy and consulate, in tabular form; the number of new hires in embassies and consulates in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26845/17]

673. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of additional staff approved and the number of staff hired for Brexit related tasks in Brussels, the permanent representation and each embassy, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26912/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 671 and 673 together.

In his response to Question 62 of 30 May 2016, my predecessor Minister Flanagan provided a comprehensive overview of the additional capabilities and resources that have been assigned across my Department to address issues arising from the complex process of the UK exit from the EU.

As Minister Flanagan noted in that response, additional posts have been assigned to our Embassies in London, Paris and Berlin as well as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union in Brussels. The Passport team in Embassy London has also been augmented in response to an increased demand for passports. The posts are detailed in the following table.

Location	Posts Sanctioned	Posts Filled
Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels	1 Counsellor 1 First Secretary 1 Third Secretary	3

Location	Posts Sanctioned	Posts Filled
Embassy of Ireland, Paris	1 Counsellor	Officer to take up duty in August 2017
Embassy of Ireland, Berlin	1 Counsellor	1
	1 First Secretary	1
	2 Third Secretaries	Officers to take up duty in August 2017
	1 Higher Executive Officer	Officer to take up duty in August 2017
Embassy of Ireland, London	1 Executive Officer	Officer to take up duty in August 2017

Brexit Issues

672. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26904/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on *Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union*. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders (especially through the government's All-Island Civic Dialogue process), and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these. As Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade, I will have special responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit, including developing and setting out Ireland's approach to the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. I will be building on the excellent work carried out over recent months, which has ensured that Ireland's interests – as set out in the comprehensive document – have been fully reflected in the EU's negotiating position. Protecting the gains of the peace process is a key priority for the Government in dealing with Brexit. This includes ensuring that all provisions of the Good Friday Agreement are fully respected and upheld, avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland and maintaining the Common Travel Area.

In order to ensure that these specific concerns are recognised, the Government has undertaken an intensive campaign of engagement with our EU partners and the EU Institutions. This approach has delivered for Ireland and I look forward to continuing the efforts of my predecessor in this regard. I have already taken to opportunity to speak directly with a number of my EU colleagues since assuming my new responsibilities.

I welcome that the Negotiating Guidelines adopted by the European Council on 29 April and the more detailed negotiating directives adopted by the General Affairs Council on 22 May deliver on the Government's objectives. There is a strong acknowledgement of the Ireland's unique concerns and priorities, including protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the gains

of the peace process, avoiding a hard border through imaginative and flexible solutions and recognition of the need to continue bilateral agreements and arrangements with the UK, including the CTA.

I am happy that the formal negotiations were launched yesterday and I will be taking stock of this first round of discussions with the EU negotiator M. Barnier and with my EU colleagues at the General Affairs Council today. It is vital that in these opening discussions a positive tone is struck and that momentum is created so that progress can be made as quickly as possible on the many complex issues facing the negotiators. It is essential that a withdrawal agreement between the EU and the UK is concluded. Not to reach such an agreement would be, I believe, a disaster for the EU and for the UK and most particularly for Ireland. It is therefore incumbent on all sides to act responsibly and to approach these negotiations in a constructive, positive and ambitious frame of mind with a willingness for compromise.

These negotiations will be complex and difficult and my Department will continue its work with colleagues across Government to ensure that solutions are advanced that reach our objectives under a range of different scenarios.

A dedicated unit on the EU-UK negotiations has been established in our EU Division, and the Department's Ireland, UK and Americas Division, Legal Division and Trade Division have been reinforced. Specific additional senior diplomatic posts have also been assigned to our Embassies in London, Berlin and Paris as well as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union in Brussels.

Brexit will also have implications for a broad range of policy areas that fall under the responsibility of my Department. We have cooperated closely with the UK within the EU on a number of these important areas, including in the area of foreign and development policy. A key priority for my Department is therefore to build on our partnerships with the remaining EU Member States and develop new alliances within the EU and engage more proactively with the EU institutions. This work is already underway. Discussions with EU partners have revealed that they too are very mindful of the need to intensify alliances post-Brexit and are also looking at how best to do so.

We have already seen the implications that Brexit has had for our consular and passport services. There has been a marked increase in demand for passports and citizenship via foreign birth registration from applicants in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In this regard, the Passport Service in Dublin, Cork and London as well as Consular Division have recruited a number of additional temporary and fulltime officers to meet increased Passport and Foreign Birth Registration demands including increased demand as a result of Brexit.

It is also the Government's objective to exploit fully any opportunities arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU and my Department, in collaboration with other Government Departments and State Agencies, is working to support Irish businesses to identify new opportunities for their products and services by diversifying into new markets as well as intensifying efforts in existing markets. The work is being taken forward through the Export Trade Council which I chair.

Question No. 673 answered with Question No. 671.

Military Aircraft Landings

674. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Defence Forces personnel that were on duty at Shannon airport on 25 April 2017 took steps to ascertain

whether aircraft (details supplied) were fully in compliance with conditions related to permission to land, in view of the fact that these two aircraft were en route from a US airbase in the USA to a war zone in the Middle East when they were refuelling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26943/17]

675. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Garda and the Defence Forces personnel that were on duty at Shannon airport on 25 April 2017 took steps or were asked to take steps to ascertain whether two aircraft (details supplied) were fully in compliance with conditions related to permission to land in view of the fact that these two aircraft were en route from a US airbase in the USA to a war zone in the Middle East when they were refuelling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26944/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 674 and 675 together. Regarding the former aircraft referred to by the Deputy, permission to land was sought in advance by the US Embassy from my Department. The US Embassy confirmed in writing that the purpose of the landing was refuelling, and that the flight was unarmed; carried no arms, ammunition or explosives; and was not engaged in intelligence-gathering and that the flight in question did not form part of a military exercise or operation and that the aircraft's destination was Greece.

In relation to the latter aircraft referred to by the Deputy, permission to land was not sought in advance from my Department. The US Embassy explained that it was necessary for this aircraft to land at Shannon Airport due to adverse weather conditions. Later that day, the Embassy confirmed in writing that the flight was unarmed; carried no arms, ammunition or explosives; was not engaged in intelligence-gathering; and that the flight in question did not form part of a military exercise or operation. The Embassy also confirmed in writing that the purpose of the landing was crew rest and that the aircraft's destination was Italy.

The Government views breaches of the procedures set down for the granting of permission for landings by foreign military aircraft with the utmost seriousness. The US Embassy has informed my Department that they will review their procedures to ensure that timely notification of requests for military aircraft to land in Irish territory is provided in all future instances. My officials will remain in contact with the US Embassy regarding this matter.

Details provided by diplomatic missions (including written confirmation that aircraft are unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives, and are not engaged in intelligence gathering or form part of military exercises or operations) are accepted in good faith as being accurate.

In accordance with international practice, foreign military aircraft which are granted permission to land in Ireland are not subject to inspection. Sovereign immunity, a long-standing principle of customary international law, means that a State may not exercise its jurisdiction in respect of another State or its property, including State or military aircraft.

Public Sector Pensions Data

676. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26973/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Overseas Development Aid

677. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contribution made by Ireland to the least developed countries fund in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27106/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Least Developed Countries Fund was established to support Least Developed Countries under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as they carry out the preparation and implementation of the required National Adaptation Programmes of Action and National Adaptation Plans. This is in accordance with mandates of the Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC and the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. Ireland has supported the Least Developed Countries Fund since 2003. The Programme for Government includes a commitment to continue contributions to the Fund. At the meeting of the Conference of the Parties in December 2015, Ireland, along with a number of other donors, pledged additional funding to the Fund. Ireland, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, provided a grant of €1 million to the Fund in 2017, based on the Taoiseach's commitment that Ireland would provide at least €6 million for the Fund by 2020.

EU Funding

678. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount of Ireland's contribution to the EU trust fund for Africa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27107/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland has committed to providing €3 million to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa over the period 2016-2020. This involves five annual payments of €600,000 to the Trust Fund. Our contribution is earmarked for the Horn of Africa Region, which includes Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, key partner countries for our development programme. The Trust Fund was launched in November 2015 at the EU-Africa Summit on migration in Valletta, as a response to the development challenges in migrants' home countries. The Trust Fund is implemented through economic programmes that create employment opportunities, support resilience in terms of food security, livelihoods and basic services for local populations, and improve migration management, including by combatting human trafficking and smuggling. It also works to support vital improvements in overall governance. The level of our contribution entitles Ireland to membership of the Board of the Trust Fund and of the Operational Committee for the Trust Fund's Horn of Africa window, which considers and approves programming under the Trust Fund for the Horn of Africa Region.

Ireland consistently advocates for the Trust Fund to focus primarily on addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, not least because it is financed overwhelmingly from the development and humanitarian budgets of the EU and of its Member States. We will continue to work to ensure that this emphasis is maintained to the greatest extent possible.

Peace and Reconciliation Programme

679. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the value of current expenditure on the peace and reconciliation fund; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [27108/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Part of the Government's work in support of the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is promoting reconciliation on the island of Ireland. A significant expression of this is the Reconciliation Fund, which is administered by my Department. The Fund's aim is to enable organisations to pursue projects promoting genuine and lasting reconciliation and building sustainable community relations. It forms part of the Government's overall efforts to help overcome the legacy of the past and to meet the challenge of building a genuinely reconciled society based on values of mutual respect and understanding. Between the establishment of the Fund in 1982 and the end of 2016 over €48 million in funding has been allocated to over 2,000 projects.

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 committed parties to "positively examine the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation", leading to a significant increase in funding for the Reconciliation Fund by the Government at the time. As part of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, the Government committed itself to guaranteeing the continued allocation of €2.7 million annually to the Reconciliation Fund.

Last year, the Reconciliation Fund made grants to over 120 projects, supporting organisations across the community and voluntary sector. These groups are building meaningful links across communities, addressing the issues that are impacting on their lives, including sectarianism, and are working to create better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain.

Detailed lists of the grants awarded are available on the Department's website

www.dfa.ie/about-us/funding/reconciliation-fund/

Consular Services Expenditure

680. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the annual average cost of maintaining an embassy and consulate respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27109/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department is responsible for two Votes – Vote 28 (Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Vote 27 (International Co-operation).

The work of our embassy and consulate network around the world continues to be important in Ireland's economic recovery and the restoration of our international reputation. Our Embassies' work in support of Ireland's interests includes:

- Promoting Ireland as a source of high-quality exports, a destination for investment, research, study and tourism to targeted audiences and contacts.
- Supporting trade missions and other trade-focussed high-level visits, record numbers of which have taken place in the last five years.
- Directly assisting Irish companies with advice, introductions and working to resolve regulatory or market access issues, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland.-
- Providing frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas.
- Influencing and negotiating for Ireland on issues that could impact our interests and pri-

orities.

The average cost of running an Embassy in 2016 was just over €1m while the average cost of a Consulate in the same year was €930k. In consideration of these figures regards has to be taken to the range of Embassies from a one person operation such as Riga in Latvia to much larger scale Embassies such as London.

Passport Services

681. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure on the passport office service; the cost of maintaining offices in counties Cork and Dublin; the number of staff employed in the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27110/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The cost of operating the Passport Service in 2016 was €31.6 million. Revenue from passport book and card fees in the same period amounted to €46.9m. Any properties occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the State are rented and maintained by the Office of Public Works. As of 1 January 2017, 301.7 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff permanently employed by my Department were assigned to the Passport Service. In addition, the Passport Service has received sanction for 230 Temporary Clerical Officers (TCOs) for 26 weeks in 2017. The number employed at any given time fluctuates as recruitment is phased and TCOs may terminate their employment in order to take up other positions. It is expected that close to the full sanction of TCO weeks will be used this year.

Departmental Expenditure

682. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the financial contributions made by his Department to date in 2017 to assist in the ongoing refugee crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27111/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are currently more than 65 million people displaced from their homes worldwide, a greater number than at any time since the Second World War. More than 21 million are refugees and more than half of all refugees are children. A further 41 million people are internally displaced inside their own countries. Ireland partners with two of the UN agencies most closely involved in addressing the urgent needs of refugees and displaced people globally: UNHCR and UNICEF. By the end of the first quarter of 2017, we had provided €7.5 million in core support to both UNHCR and UNICEF. Early disbursement of core funding to UN organisations provides them with the financial basis to plan their responses for the year ahead. Ireland has provided a total of €36.8 million in core support to UNHCR since 2012 and €46.2 million to UNICEF. Ireland's humanitarian funding to our UN, Red Cross and Red Crescent, and NGO partners enables them to continue to respond to the critical and growing needs of refugees in crisis situations. These include Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia and Uganda, Burundian refugees in Tanzania, and Central African refugees in Chad and DRC.

Through our contributions to EU institutions, Ireland also supports the EU's comprehensive humanitarian response to the needs of forcibly displaced populations, which in 2015 alone amounted to more than €1 billion.

In addition, over the period 2016-2019, Ireland will contribute almost €23 million to the

EU's Facility for Refugees in Turkey, which aims to meet immediate humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees and to bring about sustainable improvements in their health, education and self-reliance. Over the 2016-2020 period, Ireland will also provide €3 million to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which aims to address the root causes of instability and forced displacement.

Earlier this month UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Mr. Volker Turk, visited Dublin and commended Ireland's comprehensive response to the refugee crisis, our willingness to engage internationally on refugee issues, and our search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Ireland will maintain this commitment and will continue to respond to the needs of refugees globally, while contributing constructively to innovative long-term solutions to the many crises driving displacement in the world today.

Overseas Development Aid

683. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has undertaken a review into the way in which Ireland allocates its ODA to multilateral organisations in view of the Government's announcement that it expects its annual contribution to a bank (details supplied) to count towards its overseas development assistance (ODA), the impact of such allocations and his plans to improve accountability and transparency in this regard; if so, the outcomes of such a review; and if not, if his department will undertake such a review. [27114/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. My Department is committed to the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the most effective way, providing humanitarian assistance and contributing to the fight to end global poverty and hunger, including through working with multilateral partners. Funding to and through multilateral organisations is kept under regular review by the Department, to ensure that it is provided to partners which can contribute most effectively to delivering the priorities of our foreign policy and our development policy, as set out in the *Global Island* and in *One World, One Future*, and to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Ireland is currently a member of several Multilateral Development Banks, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Multilateral Development Banks are important contributors to economic and social development, and membership is valuable in building inter-regional relations and contributing to development results in the fight against global poverty and hunger.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) came into operation in January 2016 and aims to foster economic development and regional integration in Asia, primarily through investment in infrastructure. Ireland's application for membership of the AIIB, which was primarily a matter for the Minister for Finance, was accepted on 23 March 2017, and is seen as a means of both strengthening our ties with the fast-growing Asia region and contributing to its sustainable development. We hope that Ireland will join the Bank in the near future subject to the passage of the necessary domestic legislation.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD is the body with responsibility for granting eligibility for Official Development Assistance (ODA) to countries and International Financial Institutions. While it remains to be formally decided whether the AIIB will be declared by the OECD as being eligible for ODA, indications are positive that the AIIB, or certain activities of the AIIB, will be deemed to be so. In December 2016, the DAC Secretariat recommended that the AIIB be included on its list. It is likely that a coefficient will be agreed,

which will determine how much of the contributions to the AIIB will count toward ODA.

The President of the AIIB, Mr. Jin Liqun, visited Dublin in January 2017 to deliver a keynote address at the European Financial Forum. During his visit, President Jin met with then Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, T.D., then Minister for Finance, Mr. Michael Noonan, T.D and then Minister for State for the Diaspora and International Development, Mr. Joe McHugh, T.D. At these meetings, the role of the Bank, Ireland's development programme and ways to identify areas for possible future cooperation were discussed.

Overseas Development Aid

684. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland met the UN target of spending at least 0.15% of its gross national income on overseas development assistance to less development countries in 2015 and 2016; and if it is expected to reach this target in 2017 and 2018. [27115/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): This Government is strongly committed to Ireland's aid programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. We are proud of its international reputation, with its sharp focus on reducing poverty, eradicating hunger and responding effectively to humanitarian crises. The geographic focus of the programme is on Sub-Saharan Africa, where we work with the poorest communities, particularly in our key partner countries. We are delivering real and sustainable improvements to the lives of some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people in the areas of basic health, education, agriculture, and food production. Each year the OECD Development Assistance Committee publishes detailed statistical information for each country's Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows to developing countries. For 2015, the most recent year for which comprehensive figures were published, the OECD estimate that almost 50% of Ireland's total ODA was directed to least developed countries. This amounts to just over 0.15 % of Gross National Income, ensuring Ireland met the UN target. Ireland is playing a leading role internationally in focusing on the needs and role of the least developed countries. Final figures for 2016 will be published by the OECD later this year. Based on current indications and the increased level of overall spending on ODA in 2016, I am confident Ireland will again meet this target.

Human Rights

685. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the Sri Lankan Government's active suppression of the right of Tamil war survivors and families of victims to remember those that died in the recent conflict on that island; if his attention has been further drawn to the continued police harassment of a person (detail supplied); if he will condemn the Sri Lankan Government's suppression of memorial activities such as this; and if he will raise the issue with his Sri Lankan counterpart. [27127/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers. I am also aware of the allegations of police harassment against him. I condemn any such actions. Three decades of civil war in Sri Lanka, which ended in 2009, caused the internal displacement of tens of thousands of Sri Lankans, many of whom are members of the Tamil population. This remains an issue to the present day.

Given our own history, we are very much aware that reconciliation is an ongoing process and requires consistent engagement by all involved. It can take time to build trust and for the positive developments fostered by the reconciliation process to become evident.

Ireland continues to monitor developments in Sri Lanka. Under the terms of a resolution (No. 30/1) adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 1st October 2015, the Council welcomed the commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka to undertake a comprehensive approach to dealing with the past. Ireland warmly welcomed the co-sponsoring of this resolution by Sri Lanka, which signalled the determination of the Government to ensure justice and strengthen human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We are very pleased also to note the constructive engagement of the Government of Sri Lanka with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) since then and the steps taken by the Government to implement Resolution 30/1. We welcome the progress made in constitutional reform and in the situation of human rights, although more remains to be done.

In our statement to the Human Rights Council on 22 March 2017 during discussions on an OHCHR report on Sri Lanka, we recalled the commitments made by the Sri Lankan Government, including in Resolution 30/1, to address challenges facing civil society and human rights defenders in Sri Lanka and urged continuing and strengthened attention by the authorities to this issue.

We will continue to monitor the case in question including through our Embassy in New Delhi, which is accredited to Sri Lanka. Our Ambassador in New Delhi, maintains regular contact with the Sri Lankan authorities and regularly visits Sri Lanka for discussions there.

Equal Opportunities Employment

686. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27138/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I wish to advise the Deputy that part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies

- to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities
- to comply with any statutory Code of Practice
- to meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities
- to report every year on achievement of these obligations

The National Disability Authority (NDA) reports on compliance with this 3% target. In its latest published report for the calendar year 2015, the NDA noted that in this Department, 3.5% of staff had declared a disability. At the end of May 2017, this number has risen to 3.65% of the Department's workforce.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) was launched by the Government on 2 October 2015.

The Government has already taken a number of key decisions as recommended in the Strategy:

- the public service employment target for people with disabilities will be increased on a phased basis as set out in the Strategy from 3% to 6%.

- special public service competitions and alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities will be arranged.

These and other recommendations of the Strategy are being considered by a cross-party group chaired by Mr. Fergus Finlay.

Human Rights

687. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will make representations to the Colombian Government regarding the ongoing violence and intimidation of local communities in Putumayo by armed gangs operating unmolested by either the Colombian army or police force. [27234/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Incidences of violence and intimidation against local communities in the Department of Putumayo and elsewhere in Colombia, as well as the presence of armed groups in such communities, is a matter of great concern. I condemn unreservedly any intimidation, violence, or discrimination perpetrated against those seeking to defend their rights, whether in Colombia or elsewhere.

As well as ongoing exchanges with Colombian authorities at Government-level, officials of my Department engage regularly with human rights defenders and civil society leaders active in Colombia, including those working in some of the communities most affected by conflict. An important and valued aspect of these contacts relates to Irish and Colombian people sharing experiences of peacebuilding.

In this regard, I am pleased that my Department could support a two-day visit to the marginalised and conflict-affected region of Putumayo last November by a group of women from Northern Ireland. Gender-based violence was a particular focus of their programme of meetings that was organised by the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights with community organisations as well as with the Governor and some public representatives of the region. An Embassy official accompanied them during their visit, and the Embassy will continue to support peacebuilding work in Colombia.

As well as important projects such as the experience sharing work involved in the recent visit to Putumayo, I am pleased that Ireland is a founder member and one of the largest contributors to the EU Trust Fund for Colombia. We have committed to providing €3 million in funding over the lifetime of the Fund, which aims to support the implementation of the peace agreement, and in discussions regarding the Fund's strategic direction Ireland has advocated for a strong human rights perspective.

Furthermore, Ireland has this year pledged to provide €400,000 to the UN Trust Fund for Colombia and €300,000 to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to assist in carrying out their vital work in Colombia.

I firmly believe that the Colombian peace process, which aims to create a virtuous circle between peacebuilding and respect for human rights, provides the framework in which the endemic violence and impunity which has afflicted Colombian society can successfully be addressed. As we know from our own experience in Ireland, peace processes are complex, challenging and can suffer unexpected setbacks. In this regard, I would like to commend the commitment of the Government in Colombia and all parties, in particular in civil society, who are working to

support the implementation of the peace accords. Ireland will continue to support their efforts.

Military Aircraft Landings

688. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention was drawn to the planned arrival of a plane (details supplied) before it landed; the way in which assurances can be given that there were no weapons on board and that it was not involved in military operations; the details of the plane's activities here and in Irish airspace; the destination of the plane after leaving Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27364/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Regarding the aircraft referred to by the Deputy, permission to land was sought in advance by the US Embassy from my Department. The US Embassy confirmed in writing that the purpose of the landing was refuelling, and that the aircraft was unarmed; carried no arms, ammunition or explosives; and was not engaged in intelligence-gathering. The Embassy also confirmed in writing that the flight in question did not form part of a military exercise or operation and that the aircraft's destination was Germany.

Military Aircraft Landings

689. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention was drawn to the planned arrival of two planes (details supplied) before they landed; the way in which assurances can be given that there were no weapons on board and that they were not involved in military operations; the planes' activities here and in Irish airspace; the destination of the planes after leaving Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27365/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Regarding the former aircraft referred to by the Deputy, permission to land was sought in advance by the US Embassy from my Department. The US Embassy confirmed in writing that the purpose of the landing was refuelling, and that the flight was unarmed; carried no arms, ammunition or explosives; and was not engaged in intelligence-gathering; that the flight in question did not form part of a military exercise or operation and that the aircraft's destination was Greece. In relation to the latter aircraft referred to by the Deputy, permission to land was not sought in advance from my Department. The US Embassy explained that it was necessary for this aircraft to land at Shannon Airport due to adverse weather conditions. Later that day, the Embassy confirmed in writing that the flight was unarmed; carried no arms, ammunition or explosives; was not engaged in intelligence-gathering; and that the flight in question did not form part of a military exercise or operation. The Embassy also confirmed in writing that the purpose of the landing was crew rest and that the aircraft's destination was Italy.

The Government views breaches of the procedures set down for the granting of permission for landings by foreign military aircraft with the utmost seriousness. The US Embassy has informed my Department that they will review their procedures to ensure that timely notification of requests for military aircraft to land in Irish territory is provided in all future instances. My officials will remain in contact with the US Embassy regarding this matter.

Human Rights

690. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) was tortured, sexually assaulted, verbally abused and threatened with rape by the Bahraini police on 26 May 2017 and that this occurred due to the human rights work they have undertaken; and if his office will urgently raise this case with his Bahraini counterpart and speak out against the increased repression being faced by human rights defenders in Bahrain. [27527/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the person in question, and of reports of both her most recent interrogation and previous interrogations, and of the travel ban imposed on her last year that prevented her from attending the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain has been the subject of several Questions in this House recently, and continues to be of considerable concern. Despite repeatedly stating its commitment to improving its human rights record, the Bahraini Government appears to be targeting those who express disagreement with or criticism of the Government. A number of worrying developments in the last month alone suggest an increasingly restrictive attitude to those opposing or challenging the Government in any way. Statements from the Bahraini Government on its commitment to safeguarding human rights enshrined in the Bahraini Constitution ring hollow when there are so many examples of violations of the most fundamental freedoms, including those of opinion and expression (which includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas), thought, conscience and religion, and movement.

Ireland attaches a high priority to safeguarding human rights defenders such as the person referenced by the Deputy. My Department continually advocates for freedom for civil society actors to operate in a safe and enabling environment, without repression. Ireland's concerns about human rights issues and restrictions of civil liberties in Bahrain is regularly conveyed to the Bahraini authorities, including through the Bahraini Embassy in London and through Ireland's (non-resident) Ambassador to Bahrain.

Officials from my Department also raised ongoing human rights concerns with Bahrain in the context of its Universal Periodic Review, which took place in Geneva in May. In advance of this review, the Irish Mission to the UN in Geneva supported an event by the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, where human rights concerns in the Kingdom were discussed. Ireland also made specific reference to Bahrain in our Item 4 (Human Rights situations that require the Council's attention) Statement at the Human Rights Council in Geneva last September, expressing concern about "restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association aimed at silencing the voice of civil society and human rights defenders in countries including... Bahrain".

Given my Department's limited resources, it is not always possible to raise individual cases with other countries, and as such the Department often focusses on issues, not individuals. My Department will therefore continue to monitor the human rights situation in Bahrain, and will utilise every opportunity to raise Ireland's concern with this situation with the Bahraini authorities.

Departmental Expenditure

691. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27710/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has not made any payments to the company concerned. There are no

bodies under the aegis of my Department.

White Paper on the Future of Europe

692. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there will be consultations with the public on the white paper on the future of Europe; if so, the nature of the consultations; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28048/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 1 March the European Commission published a White Paper on the Future of Europe. As well as setting out the main achievements of the EU over the past six decades, the White Paper addresses the challenges that Europe is facing and presents five scenarios for how the Union could evolve by 2025, depending on how it chooses to respond. The Commission is now in the process of publishing a series of accompanying reflection papers on a range of diverse topics which will also contribute to the Europe-wide discussions that this White Paper seeks to initiate. Those papers address five distinct issues -

- developing the social dimension of Europe;
- deepening the Economic and Monetary Union;
- harnessing globalisation;
- the future of Europe's defence;
- the future of EU finances.

The European Commission will lead a public engagement strategy to discuss and debate the future of Europe in all member States. I understand that the head of the Commission Representation in Ireland, Mr Gerry Kiely, will appear before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on EU Affairs on 21 June to facilitate an initial exchange with members on the White Paper. There is clearly an important role for national parliaments to play in debating the Future of Europe and the Oireachtas should of course facilitate and encourage as wide ranging a debate as possible on this matter of national importance for Ireland. The Joint Committee on European Affairs should take a lead role in this and I understand the Committee is already considering how best to take this work forward.

Ideally, that debate should be followed in the autumn by a wider Government-led consultation process. That process should of course be as inclusive as possible involving all interested parties – including Social Partners, Voluntary Sector, academics and members of the general public. My Department is currently examining a number of options for facilitating and encouraging that debate.

Departmental Expenditure

693. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28140/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Eircodes are used by my Department in the passport application process. The Passport Service has upgraded its

processes to allow for the capture and use of Eircodes. Since 2015, modified passport application forms have been introduced which include an Eircode field in the address section. Backend systems have accordingly been redesigned. Online applications also support Eircode.

In addition application forms for Consular Services, including for Foreign Births Registration and Marriages Abroad include Eircode in the address.

My Department continues to review systems to assess how we can support the implementation of Eircode and how we can maximize its benefits in our communications with our customers and to accurately identify delivery addresses.

Where appropriate, Eircodes are included on official Department stationery and incorporated into the contact details of each office on our websites.

Expenditure specifically on system design for Eircodes:

Year	-
2011	Nil
2012	Nil
2013	Nil
2014	Nil
2015	€17,527
2016	Nil
2017 to date	Nil

Foreign Conflicts

694. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation between Qatar and its Gulf neighbours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28176/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The developing situation between Qatar and its neighbours is a matter of concern. First and foremost, it is an internal GCC matter, although it also involves other countries in the region and has wider international implications. Ireland, like all EU Member States, has interests in the crisis in so far as it has the potential to impact on citizens, commerce and regional stability. My primary concern in this situation is the Irish citizens resident in Qatar, who number almost 2,000. Ireland's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates is accredited to Qatar, as we do not have an Embassy there. The Ambassador travelled to Doha at the beginning of the month, where he met with Irish citizens and groups to discuss their concerns around the crisis. My Department, through Embassy Abu Dhabi and the Consular Assistance team in Dublin, will remain in contact with these citizens until the crisis has been resolved.

Ireland, in tandem with its EU partners, strongly encourages mediation to resolve this crisis. The cohesion of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is integral to the stability of the wider Arab region, and a swift resolution to the crisis is imperative to ensure this cohesion. It is my hope that the coming days will see a de-escalation of the tensions, and an early resolution.

Brexit Issues

695. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his Depart-

ment's plans regarding Brexit in view of the UK election result; his views on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28280/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The result of the UK general election does not change the Government's commitment to ensuring the best possible outcome for Ireland in the upcoming Brexit negotiations. On 2 May, the Government published a comprehensive document, setting out in detail its approach to the forthcoming negotiations on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document was drafted with the Department of the Taoiseach and in consultation with all relevant Government Departments. The document reflects the findings and outcomes of the extensive preparatory work and consultations undertaken to date by the Government at EU level and on the island of Ireland, including through the All-Island Civic Dialogue. It focuses in particular on the withdrawal negotiations and also looks ahead to the future relationship negotiations and the issues that will need to be addressed in this second phase of the negotiations.

A priority for the Government over recent months has been to ensure that Ireland's interests – as set out in the comprehensive document – are fully reflected in the EU's negotiating position. The Government has undertaken an intensive campaign of engagement with EU partners and the EU institutions to ensure our specific concerns were fully recognised.

This campaign of engagement has delivered for Ireland. I welcome that the Negotiating Guidelines adopted by the European Council on 29 April and the more detailed negotiating directives adopted by the General Affairs Council on 22 May deliver on the objectives the Government identified in its comprehensive document published earlier this month.

I welcome the launch of formal negotiations yesterday and will have an opportunity to review this with EU partners in Luxembourg today. It is vital that in these opening discussions a positive tone is struck and that momentum is created so that progress can be made as quickly as possible on the many complex issues facing the negotiators.

I have already begun the process of engaging with the new British Government and to engaging with our EU partners to ensure that these complex negotiations will be a success and that they deliver on our priorities of protecting the peace process, avoiding a hard border, maintaining the Common Travel Area, and minimising the impact on our economy and trade.

Middle East Issues

696. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to Israel's decision to reduce the supply of electricity to Gaza and that the reduction of electricity supplied by Israel to Gaza will cause a certain worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza; and if he will urgently raise his objection to the reduction of this fundamental supply with his Israeli counterpart. [28541/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Israel is not the primary actor in this dispute over electricity supplies to Gaza, which is primarily one between the Palestinian Authority and the de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza, who still control the Strip. For some years Hamas has charged customers in Gaza for electricity supplied from Israel, but refused to pass these revenues to the Palestinian Authority, which pays Israel to supply the electricity. No government can be expected to tolerate this situation indefinitely. The Palestinian Authority has decided to reduce the amount of electricity it pays Israel to supply to Gaza, and the reported decision by Israel to reduce electricity supply is a consequence of that.

Notwithstanding the basis for the problem, the humanitarian consequences for Gaza will

obviously be potentially very severe, and may arise very quickly. Mains electricity supply, already averaging only four hours per day following the shutdown in April of the only power plant in Gaza due to a dispute between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas over fuel supplies, is expected to be cut to as little as two hours per day. Additional power can only be provided by generators, which are not designed to run full time and for which fuel is in any case short. The consequences not just for household supply, but for pumping of water and sewage, and supplies to hospitals, schools and other utilities, are obvious.

I call clearly for all parties who have a part in this issue – the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and Israel – to act promptly and realistically to resolve this dispute, in the interests of the people of Gaza. Ultimately, full responsibility for electricity supply and billing in Gaza should be in the hands of the Palestinian Authority.

Above and beyond these issues, there are also the wider questions of the overall restrictions on Gaza, including the delays in admitting materials to repair the Gaza power plant. Primary responsibility for these problems, which have already made living conditions in Gaza extremely difficult, does rest with Israel, and I repeat the consistent call of the European Union for the lifting of restrictions on Gaza.

Emigrant Support Services

697. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the emigrant programme for finance is in operation; if it promotes renewable projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28555/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government of Ireland Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) is administered by Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in partnership with Ireland's embassies and consulates abroad. It has a budget in 2017 of €11.595 million. The Emigrant Support Programme is a tangible expression of the Government's support of, commitment to, and interest in the global Irish community. It aims to strengthen the international Irish community and its bond with Ireland. Grants range from small amounts for grass-roots groups to major allocations awarded to voluntary and community organisations operating on a large scale. Proposals for projects to take place during the 1 July 2017 – 30 June 2018 funding year are currently under evaluation.

The Emigrant Support Programme funds projects that that meet the following nine objectives: celebrate, maintain and strengthen the links between Ireland and the Global Irish; address the diverse and evolving needs of Irish emigrants, especially the elderly, disadvantaged and vulnerable; facilitate access to statutory and voluntary services in their country of residence for Irish emigrants; foster a more vibrant sense of community and of Irish identity; further the outcomes of the Global Irish Economic Forum; support business networks to connect Irish people to each other at home and abroad; research and define the emerging needs of Irish communities abroad; support development of new ways to communicate and connect with the increasingly diverse global Irish, including non-traditional diasporas; and improve awareness and understanding of the emigrant and diaspora experience.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

698. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of

practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28670/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no State bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

699. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on EU compacts which can result in refugees being returned to their country of origin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28695/17]

700. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has signed EU compacts which would result in refugees being returned to their country of origin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28696/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 699 and 700 together. The EU's response to the 2030 Agenda with its new and broader vision of development encompassing also peace and migration, has seen a number of new directions for EU development cooperation. The EU has been responding to the migration crisis and to the long term challenge of demography and job creation in Africa.

In June last year the commission published a Communication setting out a new results-oriented concept of cooperation with third countries, the Migration Partnership Framework. This represents an ambitious comprehensive approach that fully embeds migration in the EU's overall foreign policy.

Following the European Council's adoption of this approach, draft 'Migration Compacts', intended as country-specific frameworks for political engagement, were drawn up for the first five priority countries identified. These are Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and Ethiopia. As the situation in Africa evolves, including the number and scale of humanitarian crises, climate related challenges, demographic pressures and persistent food insecurity, there is a strong recognition that Africa's and Europe's interests have become more and more interconnected.

Ireland is working actively with our EU colleagues on the new Partnership Framework for all five priority countries. We have focused in particular on the discussions with Ethiopia, one of Ireland's key bilateral partners in Africa. We support the Partnership Framework as a key element of EU efforts to prevent human trafficking and address the root causes of irregular migration, and we will continue to engage positively in the process.

An important part of the new EU approach for a Partnership Framework is increasing coherence between migration and development, to ensure that assistance provided helps partner countries to address the root causes of migration and to better manage migration, including by preventing irregular migration and countering smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Assistance is also being provided to reinforce the current international protection system for refugees in the partner countries, as well as to improve cooperation between the EU and third countries on readmission and return of those not entitled to reside in the EU. This does not include those with refugee status.

While implementation of partnership frameworks remains a work in progress and none has yet been finalised, progress has been made, notably with Niger, where the fight against people-smugglers has stepped up, a dedicated agency to combat human trafficking has been established and the outgoing flow of migrants has decreased.

Question No. 700 answered with Question No. 699.

Human Rights

701. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions being taken at EU level regarding anti-government protests in Russia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28699/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A series of anti-corruption protests were held in several cities across Russia on 12 June. Hundreds of peaceful protestors were detained by the authorities and subjected to violence in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other cities. The opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, who had called for the protests was arrested and detained before he could make his way to the Moscow rally. The response of the police to the peaceful protests was heavy handed and disproportionate. The EU has expressed its deep concern at last week's events, which threaten the fundamental freedoms of expression, association and assembly enshrined in the Russian constitution. It has called on the authorities to fully respect Russia's international commitments to uphold these rights, and to release without delay peaceful demonstrators.

This and other recent developments, including disturbing reports of the persecution of gay men in Chechnya, as well as the banning of Jehovah's Witnesses on grounds of extremism, underline the vulnerable position of civil society activists, human rights defenders and minority groups in Russia.

Departmental Staff Data

702. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to a Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29039/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department facilitates a range of formal and informal mobility options for staff including head-to-head arrangements and the Senior Public Service Mobility Scheme (including Principal Officer mobility), while staff can also take part in the Civil Service Wide Mobility Scheme. The Department does not incur any cost when a staff member transfers to another Government Department.

The following table lists the number of officers who transferred to offices outside of the Dublin region in the timeframe in question. It is not possible to be wholly accurate with regard to the total number of staff that apply for transfer as the Department may not be aware of the application unless or until it is successful. In addition to the mobility schemes mentioned above, my Department also facilitates a significant volume of internal transfers to Irish missions overseas as part of the annual posting cycle.

Year	Transfers to offices outside of Dublin
2014	2
2015	4
2016	1
2017 to date	1

Naturalisation Applications

703. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26530/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation on behalf of the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

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

Brexit Negotiations

704. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if contingency planning is completed to mitigate for the loss of information sharing as a result of a no deal scenario in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26562/17]

729. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26907/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 704 and 729 together.

On 2 May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

The Government's preparation in relation to UK's withdrawal from the EU is extensive. Work to date includes contingency planning before the UK referendum, intensified analysis and scenario planning carried out across all key sectors since, and wide stakeholder consultation and engagement including through the all-island Civic Dialogue process.

There has been, and will continue to be, extensive engagement at political, diplomatic and official level to emphasise Ireland's concerns and to ensure that they are fully reflected in the EU positions. The implications of the UK leaving the EU without a deal would be very serious for both the UK and the EU, including Ireland. The focus must therefore be on finding an agreement. I can assure the Deputy that the Government is acutely aware of the potential risks and challenges for Ireland arising from UK exit, across all sectors, and will remain fully engaged as the negotiations proceed.

Insofar as the issues relevant to my Department are concerned, continued cooperation with the UK on criminal and civil justice matters, and in the maintenance of the Common Travel Area are key priorities. The significance of the Common Travel Area and the benefits it confers across Irish society are well understood. At a sectoral level, it is also clearly important that we maintain the closest possible cooperation in the field of criminal justice, and that there are efficient mechanisms to deal with cross-border civil, commercial and family law matters, so that members of the public and businesses can have legal certainty and protection in cross border disputes. Our analysis of these important issues is ongoing.

On information sharing, it is important to note that we do not envisage any diminution in the joint commitment to security and police operational cooperation between the UK and Ireland. Our respective agencies work closely together and that will continue.

Brexit Issues

705. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the cross-Border policing strategy has been revised in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26568/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The current Garda-PSNI Cross Border Policing Strategy was launched in September 2016. This second Strategy builds on the considerable advances made under the first Strategy and on the unprecedented strength and depth of the relationship between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI. North-South co-operation on combatting crime and protecting community safety has never been closer. It is the aim of the Governments and of the law enforcement services and agencies that this co-operation will not be diminished as the United Kingdom exits the European Union.

The new Cross Border Policing Strategy addresses the full range of policing areas including Operations; Rural Policing; Community Relations; Intelligence Sharing; ICT; Service Improvement; and Emergency Planning. The performance goals within each of these areas are reviewed by senior management and operational specialists from within An Garda Síochána and the PSNI through periodic assessments. This approach will ensure that any issues arising are addresses in a timely manner and that the agreed strategic objectives are maintained and delivered upon.

Passport Controls

706. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the delay being experienced by persons entering Ireland through terminal one Dublin Airport due to the long queues at passport control; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26572/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to reply to Dáil Question No. 108 of 30th May last which sets out the position on the matter. A copy

is reproduced below for reference.

I am informed that the queues to which the Deputy refers do not arise as a result of the operation of immigration controls at Dublin Airport but are rather a consequence of other factors outside the control of the service. As regards throughput generally for incoming passengers to Dublin Airport, information supplied by the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) in relation to queue times for arriving passengers at the Airport shows that over 90% of all travellers are processed through immigration control in a matter of minutes, with the percentage figure being even higher for passengers of EU nationalities. This is in the context of passenger numbers at Dublin Airport reaching record levels last year with almost 28 million passengers using the Airport.

However, there are specific pressure points outside of the control of the immigration authorities that can create some delay. Typically, this arises when a very high number of flights arrive within a specific time period (which happens at Terminal 1 in the late evening period) and the consequent increased passenger numbers within these peak times, can impact on queuing times over these periods. This situation is compounded when, in addition to scheduled arrivals, delayed flights also land during these peak periods.

Additional staff have been recruited for the Airport and the allocation of immigration personnel is designed to have the maximum number of staff on duty during these peak periods so that all available immigration booths are operational at these times. The number of available booths is a function of the physical infrastructure at the Terminal. Every effort is made by immigration officers to exercise their function as speedily as possible consistent with the requirement to protect our borders and facilitate legitimate travellers.

While the immigration authorities at Dublin Airport have no control over the number of flights or their arrival times, they have an excellent relationship with the Dublin Airport Authority and air carriers and work closely together across a number of fronts to address capacity and queue management issues where they arise, to alleviate congestion and maximise passenger throughput thus ensuring that waiting times are kept to a minimum.

I might add that a procurement exercise has been recently completed for the deployment of a permanent electronic-Gate facility at Dublin Airport. The new electronic Gates are expected to be available for use by passengers in the Autumn. However, while the introduction of the electronic gates should contribute overall to increased immigration processing capacity, the facility is primarily an immigration control facility rather than a queue management tool aimed at addressing spikes in passenger arrivals.

Coroners Service

707. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the regulations which apply regarding next of kin notification of inquest date, time and venue; the notice time that should apply; if it is the responsibility of the office of the relevant coroner; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26612/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The responsibility to notify next of kin and other interested persons of the holding of an inquest is a matter for the relevant coroner who is independent in the conduct of their duties. There are no particular regulations, either statutory or otherwise involved in this regard, but I am assured that coroners endeavour to ensure that the all relevant details are provided in good time.

The Coroners Bill 2007 proposed that a notice period of 14 days should be given by the

coroner. I will consider this issue in the preparation of forthcoming Coroner's legislation.

Prison Service Data

708. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of claims made by staff and prisoners and the total payments in both categories regarding accidents and incidents across the prison service in each of the years 2012 to 2016; the sources from which these payments made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26613/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The following tables shows the number of claims made by prison staff or prisoners and the total payments made by the Irish Prison Service for the years 2012 to 2016.

It should be noted that the payments made during any particular year do not necessarily relate to claims made during that year.

While payments may be made through the State Claims Agency or under the auspices of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, ultimately all monies were paid from the Prisons Vote.

Prisoner staff

Year	Payments made (Compensation and Fees) €	Number of claims made by prison staff
2012	2,324,676.39	99
2013	1,600,608.02	107
2014	2,055,924.72	108
2015	1,547,838.71	112
2016	2,774,962.08	138

Prisoners

Year	Payments made (Compensation and Fees) €	Number of claims made by prisoners
2012	622,725.09	135
2013	1,469,963.66	129
2014	963,599.36	801
2015	1,128,636.20	496
2016	2,882,632.30	365

Road Traffic Accidents Data

709. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 140 of 4 April 2017, the number of drivers involved in these road traffic collisions that were tested for alcohol; the number of these fatal road traffic collisions which involved one vehicle and more than one vehicle, respectively; the number and reason for persons in each of these years that were not tested for alcohol either at the scene, Garda station

or hospital after being involved in a fatal crash; if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26632/17]

912. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 146 of 4 April 2017, the number of uninjured surviving drivers that were involved by year; the number of uninjured surviving drivers that were not tested for alcohol at the scene of the fatal crash; the reason these uninjured drivers were not tested at the scene; if the report is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26633/17]

710. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 147 of 4 of April 2017, the number of uninjured surviving drivers that were involved, by year; the number of uninjured surviving drivers each year that were not tested for alcohol at the scene of the serious injury crash; the reason these uninjured drivers were not tested at the scene; if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26634/17]

711. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 148 of 4 April 2017, the number of persons that were taken to hospital; the number of those tested for alcohol in hospital; the reasons for not testing in hospital; if the report is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26635/17]

712. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 149 of 4 April 2017, the number of persons involved in fatal and or injury related crashes since the law for testing incapacitated and unconscious drivers involved in fatal or injury related collisions came into effect on 27 November 2014 in each of the years 2015 and 2016; the number that were tested and not tested in hospital respectively; the reason for not testing such persons in hospital; if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26636/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 709 to 712, inclusive, and 912 together.

An Garda Síochána has provided the following statistics in respect of the Deputy's Questions Nos. 130 and 131. I have requested Garda reports on the information sought in Questions 132-134 and I will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of these outstanding reports.

Tables 1 and 2 show the number of fatal road traffic collisions, the number of fatalities, the number of single and multiple vehicle collisions and the number of persons not tested, followed by the reasons recorded why these persons were not tested for 2015, 2016 and to 31 May 2017.

Table 1

	2017 (to 31/5/2017)	2016	2015
No. of Fatal Collisions	59	175	155
No. of fatalities	63	187	162
No. of single vehicle collisions	22	51	50
No. of multiple vehicle collisions	37	124	105
No. of persons not tested	36	87	84

Information provide is operational, provisional and liable to change and valid to 1 June 2017.

Table 2

Year	No.
2017	36
Fatality (only occupant of the vehicle deceased)	26
Hit & Run Collision	3
Driver gone to hospital	3
Medical grounds	2
Medical grounds (doctor refusal)	1
None of the Above – originally classified as a material-only collision	1
2016	87
Fatality (only occupant/driver of the vehicle deceased)	58
Hit & Run collision	3
2016	
Driver gone to hospital	12
Drive gone from hospital	1
Medical Grounds	7
Doctor/nurse not available (3 hours)	1
Driver not known	2
Witness	1
Witness took evasive action	1
Not investigated at the scene – insufficient time, 3 hours	1
2015	84
Fatality (Only occupant/driver of the vehicle deceased)	56
Hit & run collision	1
Driver gone to hospital	12
Drive gone to hospital (refused)	1
Drive gone from hospital	2
Medical grounds	9
Medical grounds (doctor refused)	1
None of the above – originally classified as a non-serious injury collision	1

Information provide is operational, provisional and liable to change and valid to 1 June 2017.

A Garda examination of records held on PULSE concerning Fatal Road Traffic collisions provides the following information, set out in Table 3, regarding the number of fatal road traffic collisions for each year for the period 2013-2016, the number of uninjured drivers from those collisions who were not tested on suspicion of driving under the influence of an intoxicant, and the reasons recorded for the driver not being tested.

Table 3

	2016	2015	2014	2013
Number of Fatal road collisions as per PULSE	176	155	179	178
Number of uninjured drivers	70	59	67	61
Number of injured drivers not tested	12	5	18	9
for the following reasons:				
Driver arrested		1	1	
Driver arrested: opinion formed without test	2			
Opinion formed			1	
Negative breath-test			1	
Collision not in a public place				1
Hit & run collision	3	3	3	2
Driver fled the scene				1
Driver Unknown	2	1	1	
Driver gone to hospital	2		7	2
Driver gone from hospital			1	
Medical grounds	1		1	
Doctor/Nurse not available – 3 hours	1			
No screening device – 1 hour				1
Not investigated at scene insufficient time 3 hrs	1		1	
Reported at Station, insufficient time, 3 hours				1
None of the above – originally classified as a non-serious injury collision				1
None of the above – originally classified as a material damage collision			1	
Total:	12	5	18	9

Information provide is operational, provisional and liable to change and valid to 1 June 2017.

Garda Forms

713. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 141 of 4 April 2017, if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26637/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy is aware that the form C(T)68, to which the Deputy's parliamentary question number 141 of 4 April 2017 referred, is utilised to record collision data and contains information including date, time, weather conditions, numbers and types of injuries, collision numbers and types of vehicles / road user, etc. This information is utilised by An Garda Síochána, the Road Safety Authority, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and local authorities for statistical, collision prevention purposes and research purposes.

The C(T)68 collision report form currently has a field within it to note the number of drivers breathalysed at the scene of a collision. At present, the Dräger Number is not recorded but a change request has been requested by Assistant Commissioner Roads Policing and Major Event/Emergency Management and IT design to ensure that the Dräger Number and reading are captured. This change request will be prioritised and will be implemented as soon as practicable.

Commercial Rates Valuation Process

714. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the existing valuations will be implemented in view of recommendations to introduce a new mechanism for the commercial valuation system; the timeframe for adjudicating on valuations currently under appeal; when the businesses involved can expect to receive an update; and the timeframe for the businesses involved to receive information regarding same. [26692/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Commissioner of Valuation has responsibility under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 to maintain a valuation list for each Local Authority, of all commercial properties in that Local Authority area, which is used to calculate the rates due from individual ratepayers. Section 9(10) of the Act provides that the Commissioner is independent in the performance of his functions and I as Minister have no function in this regard.

Revaluation is a process where all rateable properties in a Local Authority area are valued periodically by reference to a single valuation date. Following the first revaluation, subsequent revaluations of each rating authority area are then carried out on a cyclical basis no sooner than five years and no later than ten years after the first revaluation (Section 25 of the Valuation Act 2001).

The revaluation provisions in the Valuation Acts provide for the revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area so as to reflect changes in value due to economic factors, differential movements in property values or other external factors such as changes in the business environment or infrastructural changes in the vicinity of a property. The Valuation Office is currently engaged in a national revaluation programme, the immediate objective of which is to ensure that the first revaluation of all rating authority areas in over 150 years is conducted

across the country, as soon as possible, and on a phased basis. This is a welcome and positive development which is long overdue and on which considerable progress has been made in recent years.

Revaluation is an important instrument in redressing historical anomalies in relation to commercial rates. In fact, the general outcome of the revaluations finalised to date by the Valuation Office has been that about 60% of ratepayers have had their liability for rates *reduced* following a revaluation and about 40% had an increase, a pattern which is most welcome and is expected to be replicated elsewhere as the programme advances.

The purpose of revaluation is to bring more equity, fairness and transparency into the local authority rating system and to distribute the commercial rates liability across businesses more equitably based on modern circumstances. Following revaluation there is a much closer and uniform relationship between contemporary rental values of property and the commercial rates liability of properties. In essence, the exercise aims to ensure that each ratepayer bears a fair share of the business rates burden relative to the modern rental value of the property that they occupy.

The national revaluation programme currently underway is the first general revaluation of all commercial property in the State since the middle of the 19th century. It is a very significant undertaking and involves the valuation of some 150,000 commercial rateable properties. Completing the first revaluation and getting properties in every Local Authority area onto the 5-10 year cycle of revaluations provided for in the legislation represents a sea-change for the rateable valuation system. The present position is that all rateable properties in the Dublin, Waterford and Limerick local authority areas are now re-valued. In addition, 11 public utilities representing some of the largest ratepayers in the State have been revalued on a global basis. In total, this represents approximately 57% of the national rateable valuation base in monetary value terms or 33% in numerical terms.

Significant progress is being made and the programme has established a momentum which is now being built upon as the current phase of work known as “REVAL 2017” is well underway and scheduled to conclude in September 2017. It covers counties Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon, Westmeath, Kildare, Offaly, Sligo, Carlow and Kilkenny and South Dublin county council area where a second revaluation is also underway in accordance with the previously mentioned section 25 of the 2001 Act.

Proposed Valuation Certificates issued in January 2017 for counties Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath, in March 2017 for counties Kildare, Offaly and Sligo and Proposed Valuation Certificates for Carlow and Kilkenny issued in May 2017.

Additionally, proposed certificates of valuation issued to all ratepayers in the South Dublin County council area in April 2017. While generally, most ratepayers are satisfied with the valuations proposed to be placed on their properties, there is an extensive system of redress available to ratepayers who are dissatisfied with the proposed valuations or with any particular on the certificate relating to their property. In this regard, a dissatisfied ratepayer can make representations to the Valuation Office within 40 days of the date of issue of the certificate. To date approximately 17% of ratepayers have made representations to the Valuation Office. The Valuation Office will consider the representations and may or may not change the proposed valuation depending on the circumstances of each individual property.

A certificate of final valuation will issue to each ratepayer in the aforementioned counties in early September 2017 and new Valuation Lists for each of the ten counties will be published on 15 September 2017. The valuations on those Valuation Lists will be used as the basis for the assessment of rates by the local authority with effect from 1 January 2018. If a ratepayer is

still dissatisfied with the valuation on the final certificate which they will receive next September, they will have a right to submit a formal appeal within 28 days to the Valuation Tribunal, which is an independent statutory body established for the purpose of hearing appeals against decisions of the Valuation Office. In accordance with the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015, the Tribunal shall endeavour to make a decision on an appeal made to it within 6 months from the date of receipt of the appeal.

Commencement of Legislation

715. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when all provisions of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 will be commenced. [26718/17]

886. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority; the way in which a person can access the services of the Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28952/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 715 and 886 together.

The setting-up of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, whose establishment day the Tánaiste, during her time as Minister for Justice and Equality, had set by Order for 1 October 2016, has been underway since July 2016. At that time, the Tánaiste commenced Parts 1 and 2 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 as necessary to get the new Authority underway, particularly in terms of its nomination and appointment with the necessary motions of approval of the Houses of the Oireachtas. As part of the commencement of Part 2 of the 2015 Act, the Law Society, the Bar Council and the Honorable Society of the King’s Inns furnished the Legal Services Regulatory Authority with copies of their professional codes as required within one month of the Authority’s establishment under section 23(6)(a). In December 2016 sections 118 to 120 of the 2015 Act were commenced to enable the conduct of public consultations and reports by the new Regulatory Authority within the statutory periods concerned. These relate to Legal Partnerships (between solicitors and barristers or barristers and barristers - solicitors can already operate partnerships), Multi-Disciplinary Practices (where legal practitioners can provide their services together with other non-legal services providers) and certain restrictions on the work of barristers. The Authority, for which initial office accommodation has been provided by my Department along with the secondment of an officer at Assistant Principal level, also appointed an Interim Chief Executive on 1 January 2016. The Authority has met six times since its inaugural meeting on 26 October 2016, with its most recent meeting taking place on 25 May 2017. Funding support of €1 million was provided to the new Authority by my Department in December 2016. This is being done on a strictly recoupable basis as the Authority will be self-funding by levy with a similar allocation available to the Authority under my Department’s Vote for this year.

On 31 March 2016, the Regulatory Authority presented respective reports under sections 118 and 119 to the Tánaiste, during her time as Minister for Justice and Equality, and these have been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. These reports, which were completed under very tight statutory deadlines, are historical as the first formal outputs of the Authority in the discharge of its legislative functions. On 6 April 2016 the Authority commenced its public consultations process under section 120 of the Act about certain restrictions on the work of barristers - these arise with regard to the holding of clients monies and to the direct provision of services to a client in relation to contentious matters. More recently, the Authority has submitted its first Annual Report which, under the relevant terms of the Act, covers its activities for the quarter since establishment on 1 October to the end of 2016 and this has also been laid before

each House of the Oireachtas. The various reports prepared by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority are also available, along with minutes of meetings and other information, on its web page which is under development at www.LSRA.ie and will, I understand, continue to provide information over time as appropriate to the roll-out of its functions. Information will also be made available by my Department in the making of the relevant Commencement Orders under the 2015 Act that will support this process.

Alongside these developments, the working focus right now is on the managed roll-out of the Authority's remaining functions with the matching development of its organisational capacities and office and staffing resources. The preparations for commencement of the 2015 Act include, under Part 10 of the Act, the introduction of a more transparent legal costs regime and the parallel transition, within the courts system, of the Office of the Taxing-Master to that of the Legal Costs Adjudicators; and the establishment by the new Authority of a Roll of Practising Barristers under Part 9; the introduction by the Authority of new regulations for the advertising of legal services under section 218 and the separate introduction, by my Department, of Pre-Action Protocols in medical negligence cases under Part 15 which is to take place soon. Following these steps, the key structural reforms of Part 6 of the Act relating to public complaints, professional conduct and the appointment of the Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, will be commenced.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority is currently conducting an independent public recruitment campaign for a long-term Chief Executive. I understand that this process is at a very advanced stage and that its outcome will soon be announced. At the same time, the Chairperson and members of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority, its Interim Chief Executive and my Department are working closely to ensure that we can successfully coordinate the identification of the necessary steps and commencements by the Department, and the delivery, by the Authority as the new independent statutory regulator, of the various remaining provisions concerned. While it remains the intention that the Legal Services Regulatory Authority will come into substantive regulatory mode in these areas during the latter part of this year and early in 2018, the phased start-up of its various functions will need careful project management and the identification in conjunction with the Authority, of more specific delivery dates for the respective functions involved. This is something I expect to take place, including with the appointment of a new full-time Chief Executive, over the coming weeks.

Garda Accommodation

716. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the development of a new Garda barracks in Clonmel, County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26724/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations and I, as Minister, have no role in these matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 includes an extensive programme of upgrades to the Garda station network including the provision of a new District Headquarters in Clonmel by means of a Public Private Partnership. I am advised that the Office of Public Works is progressing the acquisition from Tipperary County Council of a suitable site which forms part of the former Kickham Army Barracks for the new

District Headquarters.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Data

717. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications for naturalisation and citizenship received and processed by his Department in each of the past ten years; the number of applications granted and rejected respectively in each of these years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26727/17]

718. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications for citizenship currently being processed by his Department; the number of active applications being processed for more than one, two, three and five years plus; the average waiting time for each application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26728/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 717 and 718 together.

I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the retrieval and compilation of the information requested by the Deputy for each of the past ten years would necessitate a disproportionate use of time and resources which could not be justified in circumstances where the priority is to deal with the cases on hand. Information in respect of date of application can, however, be provided for the years 2010 to 2017 to date inclusive and is shown below.

The number of applications for naturalisation received, granted and refused respectively for the years 2010-2017 inclusive is below, it should be noted that decisions in any year may not relate to applications made in the same year :

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 to date	Total
Applications received	12,546	18,330	19,990	19,053	15,474	12,712	13,011	3,936	115,052
Applications granted	5,018	12,832	23,329	29,290	18,405	11,483	10,393	3,414	114,164
Applications refused	1,238	613	407	723	879	492	484	467	5,303

The number of applications for naturalisation currently being processed, by year of receipt of application for each of the years 2015 - 2017 inclusive and 2014 and earlier is as follows:

Year of application	2014 and earlier	2015	2016	2017 to date	Total
Applications currently on hand	554	732	3,916	3,889	9,091

Over 85% of applications were made either this year or last year. It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most straightforward cases are generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a consider-

able period of time, particularly with regard to establishing whether the statutory conditions for naturalisation as set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, such as good character and lawful residence are satisfied.

In many cases delays can arise as further documentation may be required from the applicant and/or payment of the required certificate fee is awaited, or the applicant has not engaged with the office. In some instances delays can arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example where information comes to light which requires further investigation. In other instances the applicant may request that a hold be put on their application, for example where they may have returned to their country of origin for a prolonged period, to facilitate them in making arrangements to return to reside in the State, or where they have difficulty in obtaining satisfactory evidence of their identity or nationality.

Following a review of outstanding cases carried out in October last year, applicants with outstanding applications are being written to informing them that a time limit is being imposed to pay the requisite certificate fee (which consists the bulk of cases) or to supply documentation which was requested. In cases where no valid reason has been advanced for a delay in fee payment or supply of requested documents, or where the applicant has not responded to correspondence over a lengthy period of time, a further submission may be made recommending the refusal of the application and closure of the case. The completion of this process over time will significantly reduce the number of older cases on hand. Requests for an extension of the deadline have been acceded to in some instances taking account of individual exceptional circumstances.

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

Departmental Reports

719. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the projected cost of implementing the outstanding recommendations from the working group on improvements to the protection process including direct provision and supports to asylum seekers. [26769/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The projected costs of implementing the recommendations made by the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers were examined by the Group's members as part of its deliberative process. The group was mandated to make recommendations on a cost neutral basis over a period of time. The full details on the financial and human resource implications of the recommendations are set out in the Report of the Working Group, which is published on my Department's website.

The Deputy will be aware that the Tánaiste, during her time as Minister for Justice and Equality, published two progress reports on the implementation of the Report's recommendations: in June 2016 and in February of this year. These progress reports set out the status of implementation of all of the recommendations of the Working Group.

Officials in my Department, in consultation with other relevant Government Departments and agencies, are currently undertaking a further analysis of the outstanding recommendations and it is expected that a further and final progress report will be published later this month.

Juvenile Offenders

720. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of children in adult prisons; and the projected cost of sending them to age appropriate units instead. [26777/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can advise the Deputy that from 31 March 2017 all 17 year olds are now committed by the Courts to the Children's Detention Centre at Oberstown, rather than to St. Patrick's Institution. In practice, up to 31 March all 17 year olds committed to St. Patrick's Institution were transferred shortly thereafter to a special unit in Wheatfield Place of Detention.

On 12 June 2017 there were five juveniles in Wheatfield Place of Detention. The five 17 year olds boys currently in Wheatfield will not transfer to Oberstown but will remain in the adult prison system until they complete their sentence or 'age out' – this process is expected to take approximately six months.

Garda Data

721. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a full response to Parliamentary Questions Nos 51, 52, 53 and 56 of 13 April 2017 will issue. [26802/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer to Parliamentary Question (PQ) No's 51, 52, 53 and 56 of 13 April 2017. As you will recall, the information requested could not be obtained in the time available and an undertaking was made to contact you again when it was to hand. A response has been received from An Garda Síochána and for clarity each PQ has been detailed along with the answer.

PQ No. 51 of 13 April 2017 in which you asked *the number of drivers under Section 29 of the Road Traffic Act 2010 who were not eligible for a specific notice (details supplied).*

Details Supplied: *For motorists who were not eligible for a fixed penalty notice because they would have received a similar notice within the previous three years for the years 2012 – 2017 under the following:- 1. Motorists that were apprehended for having more than 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood but less than 80mg and were not eligible for a fixed penalty notice because they would have received a similar notice within the previous three years for the years 2012 – 2017; 2. Motorists who were apprehended for having more than 107 milligrams of alcohol per 100ml of urine but not exceeding 135 milligrammes of alcohol per 100ml; 3. Motorists who were apprehended for having 35 micrograms of alcohol per 100ml of breath but no exceeding 44 micrograms.*

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the specific information requested by you in PQ No. 51 of 13 April 2017 is not readily available. The relevant data is not recorded in such a manner as to allow the specific information requested to be extrapolated without the necessity for a manual trawl through each individual incident recorded which would require a disproportionate use of Garda resources.

However, to be of assistance, the Garda authorities have provided the information in Table 1.a and Table 1.b in Appendix 1 which details the total number of Fixed Charge Notices (FCNs) issued to motorists (classified under the Act as 'Specified' and 'Non-Specified') for the offence of driving under the influence (of an intoxicant) and the *current status* of those FCNs each year including 2017, valid to 6 June 2017.

PQ No. 52 of 13 April 2017 in which you asked *the number of fines or fixed penalty notices that were issued to motorists , in tabular form (details supplied).*

Details Supplied: *Motorists who were apprehended for having 35 Microgrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath but not exceeding 44 microgrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath for the years 2012 to 2017 to date.*

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the table at Appendix 2 details the number of all FCNs issued to motorists who were detained for the offence of ‘driving under the influence’ (of an intoxicant) and who provided a breath sample the result of which indicated a presence of alcohol between 36 microgrammes - 44 microgrammes per 100mls of breath, for the period 2012 - 2017, valid to 6 June 2017.

PQ No. 53 of 13 April 2017 in which you asked *the number of fines or fixed penalty notices that were issued to motorists , in tabular form (details supplied).*

Details Supplied: *Motorists who were apprehended for having more [than] 107 milligrams of alcohol per 100 ml of urine but not exceeding 135 milligrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of urine for the years 2012 -2017 to date under Section 29 of the Road Traffic Act 2010.*

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the table at Appendix 3 details the number of all FCNs issued to motorists who were detained for the offence of ‘driving under the influence’ (of an intoxicant) and who provided a urine sample the result of which indicated a presence of alcohol between 108mgs - 135mgs per 100mls of urine, for the period 2012 - 2017, valid to 6 June 2017.

PQ No. 56 of 13 April 2017 in which you asked *the number of fines or fixed penalty notices (details supplied) that were issued to motorists , in tabular form.*

Details Supplied: *Motorists who were apprehended for having more than 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood but less than 80mg for the years 2012 – 2017 to date under Section 29 of The Road Traffic Act 2010*

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the table at Appendix 4 details the number of all FCNs issued to motorists who were detained for the offence of ‘driving under the influence’ (of an intoxicant) and who provided a blood sample, the result of which indicated a presence of alcohol between 51mgs - 80mgs per 100ml of blood for the period 2012 -2017, valid to 6 June 2017.

An Garda Síochána have also provided the table at Appendix 5, which details the corresponding intoxicant level for each sample type for each classification of motorists (classified under the Act as ‘Specified’ and ‘Non-Specified’) for the offence of driving under the influence (of an intoxicant).

All figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change and valid to 6 June 2017.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE 1.a

The **total number** of Fixed Charge Notices (FCNs) issued to motorists (classified under the Act as ‘Specified’ and ‘Non-Specified’) for the offence of driving under the influence (of an intoxicant) for each year including 2017, valid to 6 June 2017*.

	Specified Drivers (€200 fixed charge + 3 months disqualifi- cation)	Non-Specified Drivers (€200 fixed charge + 3 Penalty Points)	Non-Specified Drivers (€400 fixed charge + 6 months disqualification)
2012	304	650	370
2013	187	531	356
2014	225	563	339
2015	163	501	315
2016	252	622	390
2017 (6 June 2017)	75	275	140
Total	1,206	3,142	1,910

*Data provided is provisional, operational and liable to change and valid to 6 June 2017

TABLE 1.b

The current status of those Fixed Charge Notices (FCNs) detailed in Table 1.a for each year including 2017, valid to 6 June 2017*.

	Specified Drivers (€200 fixed charge + 3 months disqualifi- cation)	Non-Specified Drivers (€200 fixed charge + 3 Penalty Points)	Non-Specified Drivers (€400 fixed charge + 6 months disqualification)
Total	1,206	3,142	1,910
Paid	832	2,564	1,426
Summons	311	451	401
Terminated	42	64	46
Still within Payment Time Frame	16	55	31
Statute Barred	4	4	2
Other	1	4	4
Payment Rate	69%	82%	75%

*Data provided is provisional, operational and liable to change and valid to 6 June 2017

APPENDIX 2

The number of all Fixed Charge Notices (FCNs) issued to motorists who were detained for the offence of 'driving under the influence' (of an intoxicant) and who provided a **breath sample** the result of which indicated a presence of alcohol between **36 microgrammes - 44 microgrammes per 100mls of breath**, for the period 2012 - 2017*.

	Drive/Attempt to Drive a me- chanically propelled vehicle while exceeding alcohol limit (Br) (36 -44)	In Charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle while exceeding alcohol limit (Br) (36 -44)
2012	265	23
2013	261	20
2014	264	16
2015	229	28
2016	316	20
2017 (6 June 2017)	114	4

*Data provided is provisional, operational and liable to change and valid to 6 June 2017

APPENDIX 3

The number of all Fixed Charge Notices (FCNS) issued to motorists who were detained for the offence of ‘driving under the influence’ (of an intoxicant) and who provided a **urine sample** the result of which indicated a presence of alcohol between **108mgs - 135mgs per 100mls of urine**, for the period 2012 - 2017*.

	Drive/Attempt to Drive a mechanically propelled vehicle while exceeding alcohol limit (U) (108 - 135)	In Charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle while exceeding alcohol limit (U) (108 - 135)
2012	40	3
2013	33	2
2014	22	4
2015	26	7
2016	22	2
2017 (6 June 2017)	10	3

*Data provided is provisional, operational and liable to change and valid to 6 June 2017

APPENDIX 4

The number of all Fixed Charge Notices (FCNs) issued to motorists who were detained for the offence of ‘driving under the influence’ (of an intoxicant) and who provided a **blood sample**, the result of which indicated a presence of alcohol **between 51mgs - 80mgs per 100ml of blood** for the period 2012 - 2017*.

	Drive/Attempt to Drive a mechanically propelled vehicle while exceeding alcohol limit (B) (51 - 80)	In Charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle while exceeding alcohol limit (B) (51 - 80)
2012	90	5
2013	53	3
2014	33	5
2015	50	4
2016	56	4
2017 (6 June 2017)	22	2

*Data provided is provisional, operational and liable to change and valid to 6 June 2017

APPENDIX 5

Corresponding intoxicant level for each sample type for each classification of motorists (classified under the Act as ‘Specified’ and ‘Non-Specified’) for the offence of driving under the influence (of an intoxicant).

Sample Type	Specified (€200 Fixed Charge + 3 Months Disqualification)	Non-Specified (€200 Fixed Charge + 3 Penalty Points)	Non-Specified (€400 Fixed Charge + 6 Months Disqualification)
Blood (B)	20mgs - 80mgs per 100ml blood	51mgs - 80mgs per 100ml blood	81mgs - 100mgs per 100ml blood
Urine (U)	28mgs - 107mgs per 100ml urine	68mgs - 107mgs per 100ml urine	108mgs - 135mgs per 100ml urine
Breath (Br)	10 microgrammes - 35 microgrammes per 100ml breath	23 microgrammes - 35 microgrammes per 100ml breath	36 microgrammes - 44 microgrammes per 100ml breath

Departmental Legal Cases

722. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to an investigation by an organisation involving a dispute between a person (details supplied) and a company, that the organisation cleared the person in their findings and that the person received moneys due from the company but is unable to claim for legal fees; if his Department has received representations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26812/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm that the Department of Justice and Equality has been in receipt of representations from the person's legal representatives and these representations have received a response.

In accordance with the Betting Act 1931 (as amended), the sole sanction available to the Minister for Justice and Equality, in cases such as that highlighted, is revocation of an operator's licence. The view taken was that this sanction was not warranted in this particular instance.

The current law, in section 36 of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 provides that gaming and wagering contracts are void and no action shall lie for the recovery of money alleged to have been won or lost. This is a long standing provision of public policy and has recently been upheld by our courts.

The General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill in 2013 proposed the ending of the centuries old ban on legal enforcement of gambling debts. However, I am of the view that this matter would bear significant further consideration both by the Government and by the Oireachtas. This consideration would have to include: the conditions on how gambling debts might be made enforceable by our courts, would it apply only to regulated and licensed forms of gambling and the potential impact of, for example, applying standard commercial practices, consumer protection or the provision of credit.

The General Scheme also contains provisions dealing with the imposition of administrative sanctions against gambling operators in appropriate circumstances.

It remains the intention to proceed with this legislation at the earliest possible opportunity.

Passport Application Refusals

723. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) who arrived here in May 2008 and is unable to obtain a passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26816/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The issuing of Irish passports is a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and is based on the person being an Irish citizen. The granting of Irish citizenship through the naturalisation process is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. All applications for a certificate of naturalisation are processed and assessed individually in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

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

Applicants for a certificate of naturalisation are required, amongst other things, to provide satisfactory evidence of their identity and nationality in the form of a currently valid passport, and may include other original supporting documents, such as a birth certificate and marriage certificate. In rare circumstances where an applicant cannot produce their passport or other supporting documents the applicant will be required to provide a full explanation. Such explanations should be supported by satisfactory evidence that they have attempted to obtain such documentation and correspondence from the relevant authorities responsible for the issuing of passports in their country, clearly stating the reasons the documentation cannot be provided. INIS will consider the reasons given and, if satisfied it is for reasons genuinely beyond the applicant's control, may consider alternative means to assist in establishing identity and nationality.

An application for naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was deemed ineligible for reasons stated in a letter issued to their legal representative on 30 January 2017. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not however preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future. When considering making such a re-application, due regard should be given to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the refusal letter and that any further application will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

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

Garda Recruitment

724. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to review the age limits for applications to An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26833/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, recruitment to An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013 and the recruitment and training of An Garda Síochána is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister have no direct role in the matter.

Recruitment competitions for full time members of An Garda Síochána are open to all who meet the eligibility criteria set out in the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013.

Regulation 4 (a) specifies that the age at which a person may apply to join An Garda Síochána as a full time member is not more than 35 years.

This upper age limit of 35 was set having regard to equality legislation and also took into account the following criteria:

(1) the cost of training and the need for recruits to serve for a sufficient period of time as full members of the service to recoup this cost,

(2) the operational requirements of the service in terms of having an age profile appropriate to the physical demands placed on members in the course of their duty.

There are currently no plans to review this Regulation.

Departmental Expenditure

725. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount expended by his Department to a company (details supplied) and other public relations firms used by his Department in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26856/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Amounts expended under my Department's Vote to the named company and similar companies, with the services provided, in each of the years 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017 are set out in the table:

	2015	2016	2017
Training	€756	Nil	Nil
Strategy Development	Nil	€24,221	Nil
Conference Facilitation	Nil	€1,450	Nil

It is my Department's policy to use in-house resources as much as possible and to restrict the use of external support to a minimum.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

726. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 88 of 24 May 2017, the number of these road traffic collisions that resulted in a fatality, a serious injury and an injury, respectively; if this report is now to hand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26869/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters referred to in the Deputy's questions and I will contact the Deputy directly upon receipt of a Garda report.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

727. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos 88 and 89 of 24 May 2017, if the road traffic collision rate is higher for those driving with chief's permission for those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26870/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the table below details the total number of accidents involving members of An Garda Síochána and 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.

Year	Overall Number of Accidents involving members of An Garda Síochána	Number of Accidents involving members of An Garda Síochána driving on Chief's Permission
2013	598	118
2014	613	114

Year	Overall Number of Accidents involving members of An Garda Síochána	Number of Accidents involving members of An Garda Síochána driving on Chief's Permission
2015	682	75
2016	602	54

Revenue Commissioners Staff

728. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria and process used in the selection of suitable persons to be appointed as a revenue sheriff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26880/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On receipt of sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in respect of the appointment of a Revenue Sheriff a recruitment process is initiated by the Public Appointments Service.

The statutory qualification requirements are set out in Section 12(5) of the Court Officers Act 1945. The essential qualifications for persons applying for appointment to the position of Revenue Sheriff are as follows -

- Candidates must, on the latest date for receiving completed application forms for the office:

- have practised as a barrister for a period of not less than 5 years;

or

- have practised as a solicitor for a period of not less than 5 years;

or

- have acted as managing clerk or principal assistant to a sheriff for a period of not less than 5 years.

Candidates must also:

- hold a current Tax Clearance Certificate;

- demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of all the legal documentation, legal systems, processes and procedures involved in the operation of the Sheriff's Office;

- have at least three years experience/expertise in the area of debt recovery;

- produce evidence that, on appointment as sheriff, he or she will give security to such amount and in such manner as the Minister for Justice and Equality shall direct for the due performance of his or her duties;

- demonstrate that he or she has the necessary technological capability to ensure that his or her computer system can meet in full the requirements of the "Sheriff Enforcement Referral System". (A copy of the detailed specification is available on request.);

- undertake to signing up, on appointment as sheriff, to the terms of the Agreement that is in place between the Revenue Commissioners and the sheriffs in relation to operational issues relating to the collection of Revenue debts. (A copy of the Agreement is available on request.);

- be responsible for providing his or her own office accommodation;

- demonstrate capacity and capability to acquire in a timely fashion specialist legal advice/support in matters of a particularly complex nature.

In addition, the following skills are desirable -

- A comprehensive understanding of Revenue enforcement procedures;
- The ability to work and interact effectively and efficiently with both the public and private sectors and in particular with the Department of Justice and Equality and the Revenue Commissioners;
- Ability to operate on a self-employed basis in a highly regulated business and legal environment and be committed to the high standards of personal and business integrity expected of Sheriffs;
- Ability to employ, manage and direct a management and office team;
- Ability to exercise independent judgment in arriving at decisions;
- Appropriate numerical and computer skills;
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills;
- Initiative and commitment to task;
- Experience of the implementation of quality assurance processes in support of the delivery of efficient cost effective services in the area of debt collection and recovery.

Following a shortlisting process and competitive interview the names of candidates recommended as suitable for appointment are forwarded by the Public Appointments Service for consideration by the Minister for Justice and Equality and for appointment by Government.

Question No. 729 answered with Question No. 704.

Direct Provision System

730. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the responsibility that his Department and-or the operators of direct provision centres have in respect of providing transport in circumstances in which no public service operates for residents of these centres specifically in relation to their health and education needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26924/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The provision of transport services for residents at each accommodation centre is determined by the location of that centre and the particular needs of the residents including school going children and other exceptional requirements. For example, contracts for accommodation centres located outside of urban areas include a specific provision that transport to and from that urban area must be provided as part of that contract to cater for the reasonable needs of residents. School going children are provided with transport services operated by Bus Éireann on behalf the Department of Education & Skills on exactly the same basis as the other school going children. Residents who are required to travel for appointments in relation to their application for international protection or for medical services may apply to the CWO for an Exceptional Needs Payments (ENPs) on production of proof of appointment. In exceptional cases, transport may be provided by the accommodation manager to meet emergency needs on an individual case-by-case basis.

Garda Powers

731. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the gardaí that were on duty at Shannon Airport on 25 April 2017 took steps to ascertain if two aircraft (details supplied) were fully in compliance with conditions related to permission to land in view of the fact that these two aircraft were en route from a US airbase in the USA to a war zone in the Middle East when they were refuelled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26942/17]

829. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the statistics for members of An Garda Síochána or airport police entering aircraft to verify that no renditions were taking place in accordance with our obligations under UNCAT in each of the years 2002 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [28181/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 731 and 829 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the general position in respect of the powers of search available to An Garda Síochána in respect of aircraft have been set out for the House on many occasions previously. An Garda Síochána has statutory powers of search and entry available to it under various legislative provisions and these apply to civil aircraft as much as to any other type of private property. However, these powers may only be exercised in circumstances where a member of An Garda Síochána reasonably suspects that an offence has been or is being committed. Of course, these powers must at all times be exercised in accordance with law.

In accordance with international practice, foreign military aircraft which are granted permission to land in Ireland are not subject to inspection. Sovereign immunity, a long-standing principle of customary international law, means that a State may not exercise its jurisdiction in respect of another State or its property, including State or military aircraft.

In respect of the statistical information sought by the Deputy, which covers a very wide time frame, I have sought a report from the Garda Authorities and I will correspond directly with the Deputy when the information is to hand.

Public Sector Pensions Data

732. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26976/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested that each of the bodies and agencies under the aegis of my department provide the information requested directly to the Deputy.

National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan

733. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the new national disability strategy has not been implemented to date. [26998/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath):

In mid 2015, following the expiry of the previous implementation plan, the Department of Justice and Equality embarked on a consultation process with all relevant stakeholders, with a view to putting a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy in place. The broad and comprehensive consultation process included three rounds of public consultations during which disability organisations, service providers and individuals with a lived experience of disability had an opportunity to provide detailed input, feedback and suggestions into the Strategy. The process concluded at the end of 2016, and while getting to this point has taken longer than we had hoped, the Strategy will be launched imminently, following the Government Decision of 30 May 2017 to approve publication. The Strategy will run from 2017 - 2021, and takes a whole of Government approach to improving the lives of people with disabilities both in a practical sense, and also in creating the best possible opportunities for people with disabilities to fulfil their potential. It is intended to make a significant difference over its lifetime to the position of people with disabilities in Irish society.

Garda Stations

734. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 80 of 22 February 2017, if he has received the report on Garda stations; if so, his plans to identify the six Garda stations committed for reopening in the programme for partnership Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27036/17]

898. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the announcement of the reopening of Stepside Garda station, the way this station was selected before the full interim report was published; if the Garda Commissioner was requested or contacted to allow this particular Garda station to be announced on 13 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29009/17]

909. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the announcement that Stepside Garda station will be reopened on a trial basis, the date on which it is expected to be operational. [28915/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 734, 898 and 909 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, and I as Minister have no role in the matter.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Síochána District and Station Rationalisation Programme gave rise to the closure of some 139 Garda stations, including Stepside Garda station, in 2012 and 2013, following the completion by An Garda Síochána of a comprehensive review of its district and station network. That review was undertaken with the objective of identifying opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the closures have allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to targeted police operations.

The Programme for Government commits the Government to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. A cornerstone of this commitment is the Government 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. Revisiting the decisions made to close Garda stations is also part of that commitment.

In this context, the Government on 24 June 2016 authorised the then Minister to request the Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of her statutory functions, to identify 6 stations for reopening on a pilot basis to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order. The pilot will feed into the wider review being undertaken by the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, at the request of the Policing Authority, of the dispersal and use of resources available to An Garda Síochána in the delivery of policing services to local communities.

The Commissioner submitted a first Interim Report on 6 March 2017, which set out a timeline for completion of the exercise, including the delivery of a final report in May/June 2017. On 9 June 2017 a second Interim Report was submitted, in which the Commissioner indicated that she will be submitting her Final Report at the end of this month. In the most recent Interim Report, the Commissioner, having analysed population and crime trends, and taking account of the availability of stations for reuse, makes a number of recommendations including that Stepside Station in Co. Dublin be reopened on a pilot basis. subject to the necessary consultation with the Office of Public Works. In the latest report, the Commissioner, having analysed population and crime trends, and taking account of the availability of Stations for reuse, makes a number of other recommendations including that if the Government decides to reopen two Stations in Dublin, that Rush Station in north Co. Dublin be reopened. However the Commissioner requests that a decision on Rush be deferred until her final report is received to allow time for further analysis to be carried out. The Commissioner has also indicated that she is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend the reopening of Leighlinbridge Station in Co. Carlow and Donard Station in Co. Wicklow, in her final report. The Commissioner has also highlighted the need to develop new stations to meet identified policing requirements at Dublin Airport and at Dublin Port. At its meeting on 13 June the Government agreed to note the key recommendations in the Commissioner's report and to agree, in principle, to the reopening of Stepside Garda Station on a pilot basis as soon as any necessary preparatory works have been completed and that the decision to reopen Rush, Leighlinbridge and Donard Stations will be taken when the final report is received from the Commissioner at the end of June.

The Policing Authority has commissioned the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, on foot of a request from the former Minister, to review the dispersement of Garda Stations in the State and the boundaries of Garda Districts. This review is on-going and a report is expected later this year.

Garda Deployment

735. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí at each Garda station at the latest date for which figures are available; and the way in which this compares with the same or similar date 12 months previously in tabular form. [27049/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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.

20 June 2017

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that on 30 April 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available, the strength of An Garda Síochána was 13,156 and on 30 April 2016 the strength was 12,825.

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

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. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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.

I have received the information requested by the Deputy from the Commissioner set out in spreadsheets which I will forward directly to the Deputy.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

736. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the type of services that the vouchers granted under the abhaile scheme entitle a person to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27060/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A range of free, independent, professional advice services is available from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) under Abhaile, to a person who is insolvent and at risk of losing their home due to mortgage arrears. These include:

- financial advice and assistance from a personal insolvency practitioner (the 'PIP Service'),
- legal advice and assistance from a solicitor (the 'Consultation Solicitor Service'),
- help for an unrepresented borrower from a duty solicitor (the 'Duty Solicitor Service'), and

- legal aid for seeking court review under section 115A of the Personal Insolvency Acts, where creditors have refused a reasonable personal insolvency proposal including mortgage arrears on the borrower's home ('the Personal Insolvency Court Review Service').

It is expected also to offer a financial advice service provided by a panel of accountants (the 'Accountant Service').

These professional advice services link with those provided directly by MABS staff, as part of Abhaile - such as financial advice and assistance from a MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears adviser, and non-legal information and support at repossession proceedings (the Court Mentor Service).

MABS acts as the gateway to State supports under Abhaile, and will direct the borrower to the services which are relevant to their individual situation.

The services which are provided, based on a 'voucher' system, are the PIP Service, the Consultation Solicitor Service, and the Accountant Service. This is to facilitate the borrower being able to choose a professional to advise them, from the panels of experts set up under Abhaile to provide such advice. The Duty Solicitor Service and the Personal Insolvency Court Review Service are structured differently, due to the more specific nature of those services.

The PIP Service includes: a personal consultation with the borrower, obtaining the relevant information on their income, assets and liabilities, preparation of a detailed Prescribed Financial Statement in accordance with s. 50 of the Personal Insolvency Acts, assessment of the borrower's individual financial situation, advising the borrower in accordance with the PIP's detailed obligations under s. 52 of the Personal Insolvency Acts on the range of options available to resolve their financial difficulties and on the best options available in their individual circumstances (with priority to keeping the borrower in their home), and confirming that advice to the borrower in writing.

The Consultation Solicitor Service includes: consideration of the detailed financial analysis and advice provided by the financial adviser (the personal insolvency practitioner, MABS Dedicated Mortgage Arrears adviser or accountant), a personal consultation with the borrower, provision of independent legal advice on their legal situation, and confirmation of that advice in writing. The advice covers any legal aspects of options identified to resolve their financial difficulties, resolution of any related legal complications, and (where the borrower is facing repossession proceedings) advice on those proceedings – as set out in further detail in reply to the Deputy's question no. 27063/17.

The Personal Insolvency Court Review service provides civil legal aid to take proceedings to have a personal insolvency arrangement come into force notwithstanding that it has not been approved by a majority of creditors at a creditors meeting or by the sole creditor. It is only available where the application satisfies the "merits" and other criteria laid down in the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995, although the applicant does not have to satisfy the financial eligibility criteria or pay a contribution towards the service. Applications for this service are made to the Legal Aid Board and not to MABS with the proviso that the person applying for legal aid must already have been admitted to the Abhaile scheme by MABS.

In the period 22 July 2016-9 June 2017, Abhaile has already provided borrowers at risk of losing their homes with 5,632 vouchers for financial advice and assistance, and with 1581 vouchers for legal advice and assistance from a consultation solicitor. Legal aid has been approved for 172 personal insolvency court reviews over the same period. These figures cover a total of 4,345 homes.

In addition, in the period 22 July -30 April 2017 (latest data available), a duty solicitor service was provided at 313 Circuit Court repossession lists before the Country Registrar, to assist unrepresented borrowers facing repossession proceedings.

Personal Insolvency Practitioners

737. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the controls in place to ensure a personal insolvency practitioner in receipt of a voucher under the abhaile scheme considers all options for a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27061/17]

738. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of times a personal insolvency practitioner in receipt of a voucher under the abhaile scheme has suggested personal insolvency as the next step for a person; if he will provide this number as a percentage of the number of recommendations from PIPS under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27062/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 737 and 738 together.

Based on that analysis, the PIP must then have regard to all the matters listed in detail in section 52(3) of the Acts, and must advise the borrower on all the options and issues listed in detail in section 52(1) and 52(2). These options expressly include, but are not restricted to, a Personal Insolvency Arrangement (PIA), a Debt Settlement Arrangement, informal negotiation with creditors to vary the terms of the debt, and bankruptcy. The PIP is also required, both under s. 52(4) and under AbA Personal Insolvency Practitioner (PIP), who is advising an insolvent homeowner at risk of losing their home due to mortgage arrears under the Abhaile service, is legally required to advise the borrower of all options available to him or her to address their financial difficulties. The advice must be based on a detailed analysis of their individual financial circumstances, and of the effect of each available option. The statutory obligations are set out in considerable detail in sections 50 and 52 of the Personal Insolvency Acts 2012-2015. PIPs are trained, regulated and supervised by the Insolvency Service of Ireland regarding compliance with their statutory professional obligations.

The borrower contacts the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) – either directly or through a PIP - to obtain a financial advice voucher under Abhaile. The borrower then has a preliminary consultation with the PIP, who will assess the borrower's suitability for the range of mortgage resolutions. The PIP will ask the borrower to provide full information (mortgage statements, bank statements, credit card statements, pay slips or self-employed accounts, etc.) from which the PIP can prepare a Prescribed Financial Statement (PFS). The PFS is a full analysis of the borrower's individual financial situation, following the detailed requirements set out in s. 50 of the Personal Insolvency Acts.

Abhaile confirms advices in writing to the borrower – this enables the latter to consider fully the different options.

The advices provided by PIPs are tracked and monitored under Abhaile. Of borrowers referred to PIPs for financial advice and assistance under Abhaile in the period 22 July 2016 to end of Q1/2017, after financial analysis and advice the best option recommended was as follows:

- a Protective Certificate (the first step in applying for a Personal Insolvency Arrangement): 55%

- informal restructure with lender or other alternative solution: 38%
- bankruptcy (in such case the PIP will provide, as part of the Abhaile service, the certificate required by the bankruptcy judge): 6%
- other referral back to MABS: 1%.

If the PIP advises that the borrower's individual situation cannot be resolved with his or her assistance – whether by means of a Personal Insolvency Arrangement or otherwise - he or she may refer the borrower back under Abhaile to a Dedicated Mortgage Arrears adviser with MABS, who can explore and assist with alternative options. In such case, the PIP provides the MABS financial adviser with the PFS and written advice that he or she has already prepared.

The outcomes of PIP advice are also tracked under Abhaile, but they can take some further weeks to complete. If the PIP forms the view, based on the PFS, that the borrower is a suitable candidate for a PIA, then the PIP will (if so instructed by the borrower) apply for a Protective Certificate, which usually lasts 70 days. During this 70-day period, the PIP will endeavour to put in place a PIA that has sufficient creditor support to enable the Courts to approve it. Should the creditors refuse a PIA proposal which the PIP considers is overall fair and reasonable to all parties, Abhaile can also provide legal aid for the borrower to seek independent review by the Courts of the refusal, under s. 115A of the Personal Insolvency Acts.

The outcomes (as of May 2017) of cases where PIPs advised borrowers under Abhaile between 22 July and 30 September 2016 and where the PIP recommended seeking a Protective Certificate, are as follows:

- Personal Insolvency Arrangement now in place for borrower: 19%
- Protective Certificate in force for borrower: 47% (where the 70-day period has expired, this indicates that it has been extended for a limited period by the Court based on ongoing work by the PIP)
- Preparation of Protective Certificate by PIP: 18%
- Application for Protective Certificate not made or withdrawn - total 16% (this may arise if the borrower does not wish to proceed as advised by the PIP, who cannot make the application unless expressly so instructed by the borrower).

PIPs are paid on a quarterly basis in arrears for provision of services under Abhaile financial advice vouchers, subject to compliance with the above requirements. For example, PIPs submitted claims in October 2016 for services provided in Quarter 3/2016, and were paid for duly vouched claims in November 2016. It should be noted that the full process - from voucher issue, to provision of voucher services, to issue of a Protective Certificate (PC) under sections 93-98 of the Personal Insolvency Acts, to conclusion of a PIA with creditors - may take some time. A PIP may have recommended in Quarter 3/ 2016 that a borrower apply for a Protective Certificate, but it may take until Quarter 2/ 2017 or later before it is possible to say whether that Protective Certificate led to a PIA for that borrower. During this time, the borrower can remain protected against enforcement by the mortgage lender, either by a statutory adjournment of repossession proceedings or by the Protective Certificate itself.

The following Table sets out the percentage of total recommendations for Protective Certificates under the Scheme during the Quarters mentioned.

	Quarter 3 2016	Quarter 4 2016	Quarter 1 2017
PIP Voucher Redeemed	658	907	1,218
Of which Protective Cert recommended	441 (67%)	463 (51%)	633 (52%)

Legal Aid

739. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the free legal advice offered under the abhaile scheme amounts to general legal advice on debt and insolvency and does not constitute specific advice to a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27063/17]

740. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of solicitors available to persons wishing to avail of legal advice as per the abhaile scheme, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27064/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 739 and 740 together.

The Government is committed to providing assistance to persons who may be in danger of losing their home. Last October Abhaile, the Government's free mortgage arrears support service, was launched. An important component of Abhaile is that free financial and legal advice and assistance is available to insolvent borrowers who are in danger of losing their family home due to mortgage arrears. Abhaile is co-ordinated by my Department and the Department of Social Protection and is implemented by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), working in close co-operation with the Legal Aid Board, the Insolvency Service of Ireland and the Citizens Information Board.

The legal advice and assistance which is to be provided to a borrower by a consultation solicitor under Abhaile is specific advice to that individual, to explain their legal situation, and to identify and address any legal difficulties which might impede his or her best option for resolving their home mortgage arrears.

Before advising a borrower under Abhaile, the consultation solicitor is to be provided in advance with the full detailed written analysis of the borrower's individual financial situation (a Prescribed Financial Statement under the Personal Insolvency Acts or a Standard Financial Statement under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process, as applicable), and with the detailed written financial advice on the borrower's best options for resolving their arrears, already prepared for the borrower under Abhaile by their personal insolvency practitioner or other expert financial adviser.

In respect of legal advice, the primary role of the consultation solicitor is to provide independent legal advice on the borrower's best options for a sustainable resolution of the mortgage arrears on their home. The solicitor may also advise the person on such matters as:

- the borrower's legal position;
- any related legal complications (for example where a co-borrower is not cooperating in efforts to resolve the mortgage arrears);
- any legal aspects of alternative solutions including those specified in the written advice from the financial adviser; and,

- where the borrower has been issued with, or is on notice of pending issue of, repossession proceedings:

- assessing whether the borrower appears to have a valid legal defence to those proceedings,
- informing the person who does not have a legal defence, but who might benefit from accompaniment to Court, of the Duty Solicitor Service,
- advising and facilitating the person to make an application for civil legal aid to defend the proceedings if they have a good defence capable of meeting the merits criteria under sections 24 and 28 of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995 and providing to the borrower, in writing, the legal advice given at the consultation(s), and providing a copy of that written advice to the borrower's financial adviser under Abhaile.

Within this framework, the precise issues upon which the solicitor provides legal advice, and the nature of the advice provided, are, of course, a professional matter for the solicitor concerned having regard to the instructions he or she receives from the borrower.

During the course of a consultation, the solicitor may form a view that the borrower could benefit from the solicitor's assistance in negotiating terms of settlement to the repossession proceedings (if any are in being). In such circumstances, the solicitor may apply to the Legal Aid Board for an authorisation to conduct negotiations. If granted, the solicitor may continue to provide legal advice and assistance to the borrower.

The number of solicitors available to persons seeking legal advice and the counties in which their principal office is located are set out in the table below. It is important to note that a person may bring a legal advice voucher to any solicitor on the panel irrespective of their county of residence.

County	Number of Solicitors
Carlow	2
Clare	1
Cork	10
Donegal	3
Dublin	13
Galway	9
Kerry	2
Kildare	3
Kilkenny	2
Limerick	3
Longford	1
Louth	2
Roscommon	1
Sligo	2
Tipperary	5
Waterford	1
Westmeath	2
Wexford	1
Total	63

The Legal Aid Board recently conducted a further training workshop for prospective members of the Abhaile solicitors panel. On foot of that training, it is my understanding that the

Legal Aid Board have received a number of additional applications for membership of the panel which are currently being processed.

Legal Aid Service

741. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a duty solicitor connected to the abhaile scheme is entitled to speak in court on behalf of persons that they have never engaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27065/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The ‘duty solicitor’ service is an innovative and important component of the Abhaile service and is arranged by the Legal Aid Board at repossession lists in County Registrars’ courts around the country. It is modelled on the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme, which has been operating successfully in many parts of England and Wales as well as in Northern Ireland.

A key element of the Programme for Government was, as the Deputy will be aware, to put in place a national mortgage arrears resolution service and priority was given last year to getting the new national Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service (Abhaile) up and running. The objective is to help these homeowners to identify and put in place solutions to their mortgage arrears, with priority to helping them remain in their home wherever possible. A new national information campaign was launched in February 2017 to reach out to homeowners in mortgage arrears and further raise awareness of the Abhaile service.

Because of the general awareness that defendants in repossession cases were turning up for court appearances in very small numbers, and because those who did turn up, were often unrepresented and fearful and without knowledge of what might happen in Court, it was considered important that this duty solicitor service be put in place as part of the Abhaile initiative.

The Deputy will be aware, that normally a solicitor is required to ‘go on record’ as representing a person, before he or she must be heard by a Court on their behalf. A solicitor who is not ‘on record’ may, however, be heard at the Court’s discretion. The ‘duty solicitor’ service in Abhaile, like the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme, avails of this discretion.

The experience to date is that the courts in Ireland have generally welcomed the Abhaile duty solicitor service, and will intervene to ensure that any borrower appearing in repossession proceedings against their home is aware of the free supports available to them under Abhaile.

The role of the duty solicitor is to provide advice and assistance in the Courthouse to a defendant who is already facing repossession proceedings. Normally, before seeing the duty solicitor, a borrower receiving support from Abhaile has already received expert financial advice and has seen a consultation solicitor. The duty solicitor will be provided with the consultation solicitor’s file, which reflects that existing analysis and advice.

Most repossession cases are heard and decided in Court before the County Registrar. A minority, where the borrower claims to have a valid legal defence to repossession, are transferred to the Circuit Court judge’s list. The duty solicitor service is provided for the repossession cases listed in Court before the County Registrar, as this is where most repossession cases are decided, and therefore, where borrowers most need assistance.

In these cases, the duty solicitor may, with the leave of the County Registrar, speak in Court on behalf of an Abhaile applicant (without coming on record). The duty solicitor must clearly indicate to the Court that the borrower has applied to Abhaile, inform the Court of the status of the application and may apply on the borrower’s behalf for such adjournment as the Court may

deem appropriate to facilitate the borrower availing of the supports available under Abhaile.

The duty solicitor's role includes explaining clearly to the borrower their legal position regarding the repossession proceedings and answering his or her questions, speaking on the borrower's behalf before the County Registrar, seeking an adjournment and/or settlement of the proceedings, and explaining to the borrower what has taken place in the Court hearing. The duty solicitor may, in so far as practicable, check the borrower's legal position, and provide supplementary advice to the borrower, in the light of any new information emerging in the course of the Court sitting.

The duty solicitor may also give more limited assistance to a person who has been served with a Civil Bill for possession of his or her home, who appears in person before the County Registrar in response to the Civil Bill and wishes to avail of Abhaile, but who has not yet applied, or has not yet received financial advice, or advice from a consultation solicitor. In such a situation the duty solicitor may, for example, seek an adjournment on the borrower's behalf, explain to the borrower what has taken place in court, and ensure that the borrower is referred to prompt assistance under the Abhaile service.

There are some overall limits on a duty solicitor's role, similar limits apply under the scheme already mentioned in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The duty solicitor may not go on record as the solicitor for the borrower nor conduct litigation related to the matter before the court on the person's behalf. If the proceedings are adjourned, the same duty solicitor may, or may not, be present on the adjourned date.

The duty solicitor will not be in a position to act in the event of the transfer of the case to the Circuit Court Judge's list or for any appeal. In such a case civil legal aid and advice is available from the Legal Aid Board, pursuant to the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995, to persons who satisfy the financial eligibility criteria laid down in that Act and in the Civil Legal Aid Regulations 1996 to 2016. The person's case must also satisfy the merits criteria laid down under that Act.

While the duty solicitor component is considered a key part of the Abhaile service intended to assist borrowers in this very difficult situation, the Deputy will appreciate that the Courts are constitutionally independent in their operation and the management of the business of the Court in any given case is a matter for the presiding judge, or in the case of proceedings in a County Registrar's list, the County Registrar.

Personal Insolvency Practitioners

742. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if those that avail of the abhaile scheme vouchers are entitled to an itemised breakdown of the cost of the services they have availed of in order that this use of public money can be transparently monitored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27066/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Full transparency and effective use of public money, in relation to the cost of professional services provided under financial and legal advice and assistance vouchers, are ensured by the design of the Abhaile scheme.

All professional advisers participating in the panels set up under Abhaile to provide 'voucher' advice and assistance to insolvent borrowers have agreed to do so on the basis of providing specified packages of services without charge to the borrower, and at a reasonable fixed cost to the State.

As these services are provided at fixed cost to the State, and without any charge to the borrower, itemisation does not arise.

A personal insolvency practitioner providing financial advice and assistance under an Abhaile voucher has agreed to provide this service for a fixed fee of €500 (plus VAT if applicable). This service includes a personal consultation with the borrower, obtaining all the relevant information on their income, assets and liabilities, preparation of a detailed Prescribed Financial Statement in accordance with s. 50 of the Personal Insolvency Acts, full assessment of the borrower's individual financial situation, advising the borrower in accordance with the detailed obligations under s. 52 of the Personal Insolvency Acts on the range of options available to resolve their financial difficulties and on the best options available in their individual circumstances with priority to keeping the borrower in their home, and confirming that advice to the borrower in writing.

A consultation solicitor providing legal advice and assistance under an Abhaile voucher has agreed to provide this service for a fixed fee of €250 (plus VAT if applicable). This fee takes into account that the consultation solicitor will be provided in advance with detailed financial analysis and advice on the borrower's individual situation, already prepared by the Abhaile financial adviser.

This fixed service includes consideration of that material, a personal consultation with the borrower, provision of independent legal advice on their legal situation, and confirmation of that advice in writing. The advice covers any legal aspects of options identified to resolve their financial difficulties, resolution of any related legal complications, and (where the borrower is facing repossession proceedings) advice on those proceedings – as set out in further detail in reply to the Deputy's question no. 27063/17.

An additional fixed fee of €200 (plus VAT if applicable) may be claimed in certain circumstances following a legal advice voucher, where the solicitor has sought and been granted authority from the Legal Aid Board to conduct negotiations to settle legal proceedings which may be pending against the borrower.

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

743. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27075/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, arising from an ongoing review of Business, Entrepreneur and Investor related migration schemes currently being undertaken by INIS, it was decided to suspend the 'Business Permission Scheme' with effect from 16th March 2016. The suspension does not affect applications received before that date or the status of persons already holding permission under the scheme.

It is open, however, to persons seeking permission to remain in the State on the basis of a different business proposal to make an application under the Start Up Entrepreneur Programme (STEP). This Programme was introduced in 2012, to enable non-EEA Nationals and their families commit to a high potential start up business (HPSU) in Ireland.

All applicants to the STEP programme must secure funding of at least €50,000 in order to meet the criteria. This funding can be from their own resources, a business loan, Business Angel/Venture Capital funding or a Grant from an Irish State Agency. The programme already provides for investment into high tech start up schemes. There is an Expert Independent Evalu-

ation Committee who review and evaluate all applications under the various strands of the investor programme. It should be noted that there is no question of a person who contributes to the funding of €50,000 under the STEP, other than the entrepreneur herself/himself, receiving a residency permission under this programme.

The Deputy may also be aware that it is open to non-EEA investors who themselves wish to obtain a residency permission, to consider the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP), which allows investors to acquire a residence permission, on investment of €1 million into an approved project.

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

Garda Misconduct Allegations

744. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a statutory inquiry into allegations of Garda misconduct made by the former chief executive of a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27079/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy refers to a case which has been the subject of a review carried out under the Independent Review Mechanism set up by the Government to consider allegations against the Garda Síochána. In the case referred to in the Deputy's question I can confirm that on 15 May the then Minister signed an Order establishing an inquiry under section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 into matters raised in the allegations made by the person in question. The inquiry is being conducted by Judge Patrick McMahon, retired judge of the District Court. As the matter is now the subject of a statutory inquiry, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the case.

Garda Data

745. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of student gardaí that left the service before their attestation in the past 20 years; the number of gardaí that left the force before reaching 50 years of age in the past 20 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27103/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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 Garda Commissioner that number of student Gardaí that left An Garda Síochána before attestation for the period 1997 to date is 63.

I am further informed that the number of members who left An Garda Síochána before reaching 50 years of age for the period 1997 to date is 1,109.

Garda Data

746. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí discharged from the force on grounds of incapacitation due to injury received in the execution of duty without fault to the member in the past 25 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27104/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including personnel matters relating to members of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Gardaí who have departed from An Garda Síochána owing to medical discharge, including ordinary ill-health retirement and injury on duty (special ill-health retirement) was 451 during the period from 1 January 1992 to 6 May 2017.

I am further informed that it is not possible to provide the specific information requested regarding the number of medical discharges due to injury on duty as it is not readily available and would require a disproportionate amount of Garda time and resources to collate.

Garda Remuneration

747. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of retirement gratuity paid to members leaving An Garda Síochána in the past 25 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27105/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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 Garda Commissioner that the cost of lump sum retirement gratuity payments to members of An Garda Síochána for each year since 2002 to 2016 and up to 31 May 2017, was as set out in the table below. I am further informed that details of the cost of retirement gratuity payments prior to 2002 are not readily available and would necessitate a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources to collate.

Garda Retirement Gratuity Payments 2002 - 2017

Year	Expenditure
2002	€27,344,721
2003	€29,154,740
2004	€34,827,513
2005	€38,115,683
2006	€29,466,652
2007	€20,833,552
2008	€27,089,234

Year	Expenditure
2009	€76,429,028
2010	€34,204,702
2011	€51,711,763
2012	€46,177,496
2013	€29,986,897
2014	€25,909,669
2015	€24,193,777
2016	€24,284,856
Jan to May 2017	€8,237,698

Legislative Measures

748. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the local authorities that have adopted Part III of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956; the date the Act was adopted by those local authorities, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27128/17]

749. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the local authorities that adopted and subsequently abandoned Part III of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956; the date which it was abandoned by those local authorities, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27129/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 748 and 749 together.

I can confirm to the Deputy that the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 and the Part referred to has been in full effect for quite some time.

While these provisions referred to are contained in an Act under the auspices of the Minister for Justice and Equality, they relate wholly to the responsibility of a local authority to take certain actions or not. I have no role or responsibility in relation to the actions of local authorities and my Department does not have the information requested by the Deputy.

Equal Opportunities Employment

750. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27141/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 provides for a statutory report on the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. My colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, must submit an annual report to the National Disability Authority (NDA) giving details of the number of people with a disability employed in the Civil Service.

I can inform the Deputy that the proportion of staff with a disability employed in my Depart-

ment, and those agencies under the aegis of my Department, exceeds the Government's 3% target for the employment of people with disabilities across the public sector and currently stands at 5.4%. My Department's commitment to the employment of people with disabilities is further underlined by its active participation in the Willing and Able Mentoring, a work experience programme for graduates with disabilities, under which we are currently seeking to facilitate 5 participants in 2017.

Appointment to civil service positions is generally by way of open competition conducted by the Public Appointments Service. Persons with disabilities are entitled to apply for all competitions subject to their meeting the eligibility requirements of the competition in question. My Department is fully committed to the employment of people with disabilities. Our policy is to ensure that people with disabilities are facilitated with access to employment opportunities and every necessary accommodation is made in this regard.

Garda Data

751. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí driving with chief's permission in the each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of gardaí that completed the CPD1 and CPD2 driving courses, respectively, in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27171/17]

752. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if different levels of insurance are required and in place for gardaí driving on chief's permission and those that have completed the CPD1 and CPD2 driving courses, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27172/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 751 and 752 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including by arranging for the training of the members and civilian staff of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the State Claims Agency provides indemnity to all Designated State Authorities - which includes An Garda Síochána. This indemnity applies in respect of any claims for personal injury (including those to passengers, service users, the public and employees) and third party property damage associated with authorised use of Garda Vehicles on approved Garda business.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the other matters raised by the Deputy and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Departmental Correspondence

753. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received correspondence (details supplied) regarding Limerick prison; his plans to investigate the matters raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27187/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the correspondence referred to was received in my Department on 25 April 2017.

A preliminary assessment of the anonymous correspondence took place under my Department's Protected Disclosure Policy. This assessment determined that an element of the allegation contained in the correspondence required further review under the policy. This review is currently being undertaken.

A number of other matters referred to in the correspondence are being reviewed and investigated internally by the Irish Prison Service.

As the review and investigation are currently ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Departmental Correspondence

754. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received correspondence (details supplied) regarding Limerick prison; his plans to investigate the matters raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27219/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform the Deputy that the correspondence referred to was received in my Department on 25 April 2017. A preliminary assessment of the anonymous correspondence took place under my Department's Protected Disclosure Policy. This assessment determined that an element of the allegation contained in the correspondence required further review under the policy. This review is currently being undertaken.

A number of other matters referred to in the correspondence are being reviewed and investigated internally by the Irish Prison Service. As the review and investigation are currently ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time

Irish Sign Language

755. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the recognition of Irish sign language as an official language; if the progression of the Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2013 is a priority for the government; if so, the expected timeframe for its enactment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27266/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): I consider that it is appropriate and necessary that the needs of users of Irish Sign Language (ISL) in the State are met, particularly when questions of statutory entitlement or obligations are at issue. In this respect, as the Deputy will be aware publication of a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy was approved by Government on 30 May and it will be launched shortly. Issues in relation to the Deaf Community featured strongly in the consultation process that underpinned the development of the Strategy, and in my view the Strategy responds credibly to the concerns raised. I can confirm that the Strategy contains the following actions:

- The extension of the hours of the ISL remote interpretation service to evenings and weekends

- The resourcing of the Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) to increase the number of trained sign language and deaf interpreters, to put a quality-assurance and registration scheme for interpreters in place and to provide on-going professional training and development.

- Support for legislation to ensure that all public bodies provide ISL users with free interpretation when accessing or availing of their statutory services.

I believe that this approach will make a real and measurable difference in the lives of ISL users. In relation to the PMB referred to, as the Deputy will be aware, the Bill is currently awaiting Committee Stage. As I indicated in my second stage speech on the Bill, it contains provisions that are disproportionate and excessively onerous and requires substantial amendments, and my officials are in ongoing discussion with the sponsors of the Bill in this regard.

Equal Opportunities Employment

756. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to publish new legislation on the rights of persons to work while awaiting decisions on permanent permission to remain in the State in view of the recent Supreme Court decision on the matter; his further plans to publish the proposed heads of a Bill in advance of legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27271/17]

757. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he will take following the recent Supreme Court judgment in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27289/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 756 and 757 together.

Clearly this is an important judgment and its full implications are being examined carefully. The Court itself recognises the complexities around this issue in that it acknowledges the Executive function in not only controlling who should enter the State but also to regulate the activities of non-citizens while in the State and has had to consider the distinctions of rights between citizens and non-citizens in the context of Article 40.1 of the Constitution.

It has concluded that an absolute ban on the right to work (as distinct from a time limit being set in legislation or some other means), is contrary to rights under Article 40.1 of the Constitution. The Court recognises that this is a matter for the Executive and Legislature to consider and accordingly has adjourned consideration of the Order the Court should make for a period of six months. Full consideration of the judgment will be given over the coming period and it is expected that the State will make submissions to the Court in relation to the format of the order the Court is to make at the appropriate time.

In many EU Member States, the right to work is not an unfettered right, often arising after a particular period of time – usually 9 months to a year – and in many instances may be limited to particular job categories or the withdrawal of other financial supports, etc. One of the principal aims of the International Protection Act, which was commenced at the end of last year, is to process cases as quickly as possible so that persons in need of international protection are granted status quickly, thereby giving them an automatic right to work.

The judgment raises obvious policy, legal and operational issues spanning a number of Departments and agencies and my Department, working with the Office of the Attorney General, and in consultation with other Departments, will be examining the impacts of the judgment and the legislative options in the coming period.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

758. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received to date in 2017 for the community CCTV scheme; the number of applications received by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27296/17]

759. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications which have been granted to date for the community CCTV scheme; the number of granted applications by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27297/17]

760. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding allocated to date through the community CCTV scheme; the amount of funding allocated by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27298/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 758 to 760, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that on 13 April last the then Minister launched a new grant aid scheme to assist community-based groups to establish community-based CCTV systems in their local areas.

Under the scheme, which is being administered by my Department, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000. Upon approval for funding, the applicant will receive an up-front payment of 50% of the grant with the balance to be paid when the CCTV system is fully operational. Full details of the scheme, including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are all available from my Department's website.

While my Department has received a number of enquiries in relation to the scheme, no formal applications have yet been received. I would strongly encourage interested groups to avail of the scheme.

Departmental Staff Data

761. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the organisational breakdown of the policing division of his Department; and the personnel changes that have taken place in the division from assistant principal officer to assistant secretary level since 2005. [27326/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Policing Division of my Department comprises an Assistant Secretary and, at the present date, 5 Principal Officer and 8 Assistant Principal posts together with relevant staff. The areas comprising the Division are: Garda Industrial Relations Section, Garda Síochána Section, Governance and Accountability Section, and Policing Authority Section. The Policing Authority Section acts as liaison between my Department and the independent Policing Authority.

There has been significant turnover in personnel in Policing Division since 2005, and there has been a complete change in all the grades in question since 2014. Records are not held in such a way as to be able to easily identify individual post-holders over time.

Tribunals of Inquiry Establishment

762. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Policing Authority was consulted in advance by the Garda Commissioner regarding the hiring of all persons that are now employed as part of the Charleton liaison committee. [27328/17]

763. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the date on which and the format in which the Garda Commissioner consulted with his Department regarding the creation of the Charleton liaison committee. [27329/17]

764. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017 (details supplied), the meaning of the phrase “the Commissioner subsequently sought formal sanction to retain the services of a small number of individuals”; and the way in which the Commissioner sought sanction to retain persons if they had not already been formally sanctioned by her Department, the Policing Authority and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. [27330/17]

765. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the way in which the Garda Commissioner sought sanction to retain persons to work on the Charleton liaison committee in view of the fact that this was a new committee that did not exist beforehand. [27331/17]

766. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, if the Garda Commissioner employed persons as part of the Charleton liaison committee before getting formal sanction from his Department, the Policing Authority or the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. [27332/17]

767. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, if his Department was consulted regarding the persons that would be hired by the Garda Commissioner as part of the Charleton liaison committee prior to their selection. [27333/17]

768. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the names of the persons that the Garda Commissioner has hired to be part of the Charleton liaison committee; the length of their contract; and the commencement date of each person. [27334/17]

769. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, if all the persons that have been hired by the Garda Commissioner to form part of the Charleton liaison committee were employed following a full public procurement process; and if so, the details regarding same. [27335/17]

770. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, if the persons that are now part of the Charleton liaison committee commenced work prior to the Garda Commissioner obtaining formal approval from the his Department, the Policing Authority and the Department of Public Expenditure. [27336/17]

771. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the date on which approval was given by his Department for the Garda Commissioner to engage a solicitor as part of the Charleton liaison committee. [27337/17]

772. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the date on which consultation was made by the Garda Commissioner regarding the hiring of a solicitor as part of the Charleton liaison committee. [27338/17]

773. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the reason it was felt necessary for the Garda Commissioner to hire a solicitor to be part of the Charleton liaison committee in view of the fact that An Garda Síochána already has an in house legal team. [27339/17]

774. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the details of the procurement process that took place for the solicitor that was hired as part of the Charleton liaison committee by the Garda Commissioner. [27340/17]

775. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 62 of 1 June 2017, the contact details, commencement date and remuneration of the solicitor that was hired by the Garda Commissioner to be part of the Charleton liaison committee. [27341/17]

776. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the purpose of the Charleton liaison committee that is based in An Garda Síochána; the location in which the committee is based; the number of persons that work in the committee; the reporting structures of persons based in the committee; the persons that have access to the work of the committee; and the budget available to it. [27342/17]

777. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all gardaí irrespective of rank or title that are referenced in the Charleton commission have equal access to the Charleton liaison committee, equal use of its resources and equal access to its information and data as it pertains to their individual modules. [27343/17]

778. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he received Government approval for the setting up of the Charleton liaison committee; and if so, the date on which. [27345/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 762 to 778, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, I established the Disclosures Tribunal following the passing of Resolutions by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann on 16 February 2017.

As the Deputy will also be aware it is the Garda Commissioner who has statutory responsibility to carry on and manage and control generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána. Accordingly, the putting in place of internal structures to service the Tribunal is a matter for the Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. The question of Government approval does not arise.

Having said that, the Government has been anxious to ensure that the Disclosures Tribunal receives the greatest degree of assistance possible from all parties, not least An Garda Síochána, and to that end has been supportive of the Commissioner in ensuring that she has the resources at her disposal to service the Tribunal in a timely and effective manner. This has been particularly important in the context of the sole member's stated intention to carry out the work of the Tribunal rapidly. The Commissioner identified a requirement that could best be met by the re-engagement of a small number of retired persons and my Department approved this in February 2017, subject to formal sanction, which was conveyed in May 2017. The formal sanction provided for the engagement of three persons (i.e. two retired members of An Garda Síochána and one civilian) for up to 9 months for the purposes of servicing the Tribunal. I am advised that the services of two former members of An Garda Síochána (a former Chief Superintendent and a former Assistant Commissioner) have been engaged for a period of six months to 31 August

2017 and that their contracts fully comply with pension abatement regulations. My Department was not consulted nor should it have been in relation to the selection of the individuals concerned. In the event I understand that it has not proved possible to recruit the former civilian member.

The rehiring of persons on a contract basis does not require the approval of either the Policing Authority or the Government. Neither is there a requirement to tender for the purposes of rehiring retired individuals on a temporary basis.

Approval was also formally conveyed in May 2017 to retain the services of a solicitor which would require a procurement process and the involvement of the Office of Government Procurement. In the event, those services are being provided by the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the Commissioner has not availed of the sanction to date.

It should be understood that the provision of these additional resources is to ensure that An Garda Síochána as an organisation is able to cooperate with the Tribunal to the fullest extent, without unduly affecting the ability of the organisation to continue to carry out its vital work, and in that context the Commissioner judged it appropriate that some persons be engaged externally, as with the retired members who have been taken on.

Given the independence of the Disclosures Tribunal, matters relating to access to the Tribunal by members of An Garda Síochána, or indeed by any person, is a matter for the sole member, Mr. Justice Peter Charleton, to decide on. Any member of An Garda Síochána who is or may be requested to cooperate with the Tribunal may either seek his/her own legal assistance or raise the issue of representation by the legal team retained by the Commissioner, and it should be noted that the sole member has already granted legal representation to An Garda Síochána as a whole and to various other parties, including a number of individual Garda members who have a particular interest in the matters to be examined by the Tribunal.

The work of the two retired members supports the Disclosure Tribunal Co-Ordination Office based in Garda Headquarters. That office is staffed by one full-time member, seconded temporarily from the Office of Corporate Communications. A number of additional personnel are facilitating the work of this office on an ad hoc basis as requirements dictate. I am further informed that liaison persons have been nominated from relevant sections/Regions to deal with specific requests from the Tribunal.

Finally, as the Deputy will be aware the sole member has indicated that the Tribunal will be commencing public hearings shortly and it is important that everyone should allow the Tribunal to get on with the very important work with which it has been tasked.

Prisoner Transfers

779. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 114 of 30 May 2017, if he will clarify the meaning of operational grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27368/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position to comment on individual prisoner matters.

I will however advise the Deputy that when considering prisoners for sentence management decisions such as transfers, temporary release, transfer to Open Centres and other concessions, my officials in the Irish Prison Service consider a wide range of issues, as outlined in my response to PQ 114 of 30 May 2017.

All of the factors outlined in that response are considered 'Operational' and any one of those factors, or a combination of them, can lead to a decision to approve or reject an application on Operational grounds.

Garda College

780. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda graduates from Templemore college by station and division in each of the past five years and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27370/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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.

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

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. 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.

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

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

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Commissioner in relation to the number of Garda graduates from Templemore College by station and I will write to her on receipt of same.

For the Deputy's information I have set out below, as provided by the Commissioner, the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda Division from 2015 to date in 2017.

Due to the moratorium on recruitment there were no attestations in the period 2012 to 2014.

Number of newly attested Garda allocated				
DIVISION	DIVISIONAL HQ	2015	2016	2017
D.M.R. EAST	DUN LAOGHAIRE	9	19	14
D.M.R. NORTH	BALLYMUN	19	33	23
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	STORE STREET	22	43	28
D.M.R. SOUTH	CRUMLIN	18	35	28
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	PEARSE STREET	19	44	29
D.M.R. WEST	BLANCHARD-STOWN	30	35	23
KILDARE	NAAS	15	20	15
LAOIS/OFFALY	PORTLAOISE	9	20	17
MEATH	NAVAN	5	19	7
WESTMEATH	MULLINGAR	5	5	12
WICKLOW	BRAY	9	0	4
CAVAN/MONAGHAN	MONAGHAN	10	7	4
DONEGAL	LETTERKENNY	8	5	4
LOUTH	DROGHEDA	25	17	7
SLIGO/LEITRIM	SLIGO	5	5	3
KILKENNY/CARLOW	KILKENNY	10	10	10
TIPPERARY	THURLES	5	15	11
WATERFORD	WATERFORD	14	10	6
WEXFORD	WEXFORD	15	10	7
CORK CITY	ANGLESEA STREET	5	5	10
CORK NORTH	FERMOY	0	5	5
CORK WEST	BANDON	5	0	5
KERRY	TRALEE	9	0	6
LIMERICK	HENRY STREET	8	16	9
CLARE	ENNIS	10	5	0
GALWAY	GALWAY	4	5	0
MAYO	CASTLEBAR	3	0	5
ROSCOMMON/LONGFORD	ROSCOMMON	0	5	0
TOTAL		296	393	292

Emergency Planning

781. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to increase security and defence in view of the London attacks; if full funding and legislative provisions have been put in place to implement the Schengen information system (SIS); and if a timeframe can be given for full operationalisation of SIS here. [27396/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The current assessment of the threat here is that while a terrorist attack here is possible, it is unlikely and there is no specific information in relation to any threat to Ireland from international terrorism.

The level of threat is kept under constant and active review by the Garda Authorities. The House will understand the detail of security arrangements that are in place should not be disclosed. An Garda Síochána has 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. The considerable skills and resources of the Defence Forces are also available in support to the civil power when and where needed.

They are engaged in intensive, ongoing work aimed at preventing any attack taking place here. In this regard they work closely with the Defence Forces. Detailed preparations have also been made in the event of an attack. Other agencies also have plans in place to deal with the outcome of major incidents.

As the Deputy will be aware, the former Taoiseach chaired a meeting on 25 May to review the State's arrangements and level of preparedness in the event of a major terrorist attack here. The former Taoiseach and the Tánaiste, as well as a number of other Ministers with relevant responsibilities, attended along with the Garda Commissioner, the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces and senior officials. The meeting was briefed on the current threat assessment by the security authorities.

It is also important to note that overall national emergency management arrangements are in place, involving all the different agencies of the State. Co-ordinated by the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning and the Office of Emergency Planning, all the various agencies and bodies continue to work closely together in supporting co-ordinated responses to any incident that might arise.

Of equal importance is the ongoing work to counter radicalisation. It is important to ensure that in the context of attacks such as those in London and Manchester, our Muslim community is not unfairly stigmatised. The Gardaí have developed a strong model of community-level interaction with minority communities in the State, including our Muslim community, and will maintain that interaction in order to serve those communities and to ensure that vulnerable individuals within those communities can be supported appropriately.

The authorities here will continue to work closely with their EU and other international counterparts in responding to the shared threat to national and international security. The work of Garda liaison officers who are permanently based in other jurisdictions and in international bodies such as Interpol and Europol, greatly facilitate the prompt exchange of information and intelligence on criminal activity. Such international liaison has led to many parallel investigations with international law enforcement agencies. An Garda Síochána also shares and accesses information with its EU and other partners through a number of other different sources and systems, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The Government is committed to providing An Garda

Síochána with the necessary resources to enhance their connectivity to a range of EU and other international resources and a significant programme of work is ongoing in this regard supported by dedicated funding.

In addition to our extensive work on prevention and preparedness, priority is being afforded to Ireland's joining the Schengen Information System. In December 2016, An Garda Síochána entered a contract for full end-to-end delivery of the SIS, from ICT development to full operational roll-out, and they are working intensively with their contractors on the early stages of that contract. In parallel, my officials are working with An Garda Síochána and other Government Departments and Agencies to ensure that we can fully implement all aspects of the Schengen Acquis in relation to police and judicial cooperation. It is not currently possible to give a time-frame for full operationalisation of the SIS, because there are significant external dependencies in relation to EU evaluation. Our aim is to commence that evaluation process in 2019.

Citizenship Status

782. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will grant family citizenship to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27405/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is as stated in the response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No. 105 of 23 May 2017. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from persons with the family name referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship through the naturalisation process if and when they are in a position to meet all the statutory conditions for naturalisation under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line residency calculator which may be of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Departmental Contracts Data

783. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form, by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27455/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The information requested by the Deputy could not be compiled in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly

when the information is available.

Departmental Contracts Data

784. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of contracts for the procurement of information technology products and or services that were signed by An Garda Síochána for values greater than €15,000 between 1 October and 31 December 2015. [27494/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda resources, including the procurement of ICT products and services, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister, have no role in the matter.

However, I have been informed by the Commissioner that the specific information requested is as outlined in the following table.

Title of Goods/Services	Contract Awarded	Supplier
Network Storage Systems	30 November 2015	Dell

Garda Information and Communications Technology

785. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of individual information technology and information technology service tenders advertised by An Garda Síochána for values greater than €15,000 between 1 October and 31 December 2015. [27495/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda resources, including the procurement of ICT products and services, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister, have no role in the matter.

I have, however, been informed by the Commissioner that there was one tender for the design, development and support of a website published by An Garda Síochána on the website, eTenders.gov.ie, which is a central facility for advertising all public sector procurement opportunities during the period referred to by the Deputy.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

786. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the purpose, value and time line associated with each information technology contract and tender signed or issued by An Garda Síochána for 2015. [27496/17]

787. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of contracts signed by An Garda Síochána with a company (details supplied) in 2015 for a contractual value of greater than €15,000. [27497/17]

788. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the dates on which each of the 2015 contracts with a company (details supplied) were signed; the person that signed them; and the purpose and value of each of the contracts signed with the company by An Garda Síochána in that period of time. [27498/17]

789. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there was a full procurement process in respect of each of the contracts with a company (details supplied) in 2015; and the names of the underbidders in the competitions held at the time. [27499/17]

790. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of money that has been paid by An Garda Síochána to a company (details supplied) and or its value added resellers from the Garda vote in the financial years 2015, 2016, and 2017. [27500/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 786 to 790, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda resources, including the procurement of ICT products and services, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister, have no 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.

Coroners Service

791. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a death certificate for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27541/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The legislation governing how coroners operate is the Coroners Act, 1962. Under this legislation a coroner is a statutory officer exercising quasi-judicial functions, in relation to which he or she is independent. The coroner is responsible for the scheduling and conduct of inquests in his or her district. There may be a number of factors which give rise to delays in the completion of the inquest and the subsequent notification to the Registrar of the details necessary for the issuing of a death certificate. Neither I, nor my Department, has any role in that regard and the Deputy may wish to contact the relevant coroner's office.

Emergency Planning

792. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if An Garda Síochána has participated in planned live field exercises with the Defence Forces with a view to assessing the State's contingency capability for effective co-ordinated responses to terrorist incidents and ensuring it is fit for purpose; if so, if such exercises have been followed by immediate professional lessons identified and lessons learned processes; the number of times such exercises have taken place in 2016 and to date 2017; the number of Garda personnel involved in each of the exercises; and if such exercises are planned in the future. [27582/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that it is generally not the practice to disclose the detail of the security arrangements that are in place to deal with threats to the State, including the threat from international terrorism. However, I want to assure the Deputy and the House that, contrary to what can only be described as unhelpful recent public commentary, the Garda and Defence Forces Authorities work together on an ongoing basis to ensure preparedness for effective responses to terrorist incidents.

This work takes place bilaterally at strategic and operational levels between the Gardaí and Defence Forces and it is also pursued in the broader context of the State's overall framework

for Major Emergency Management that ensure cross-agency co-ordination.

Of its nature, the detail of much of this work should not be disclosed publicly, but the Deputy should be assured that it goes on continuously. I am however, happy to confirm to the Deputy that joint training and scenario-based exercises have been and are conducted, and that these arrangements are carried out and followed-up in accordance with best practice.

It is also important to note that overall national emergency management arrangements are in place, involving all the different agencies of the State. Overseen by the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning and co-ordinated by the Office of Emergency Planning, all the various agencies and bodies continue to work together in supporting co-ordinated responses to any incident that might arise. A feature of the emergency planning framework is the conduct of multi-agency exercises to test and to enhance preparedness, and exercises in respect of terrorist incidents have been and will continue to be included in those arrangements. Once again such exercises are conducted in accordance with best practice.

Refugee Status Applications

793. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a decision will be made on the application for refugee status subsidiary protection by a person (details supplied). [27601/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The International Protection Act, 2015, was commenced on 31 December 2016. Under the Act, a new single application procedure was introduced under which all aspects of a person's claim (asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain) are considered together by the International Protection Office (IPO) rather than sequentially as heretofore. The IPO replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from the commencement date. The Chief International Protection Officer (CIPO) and the International Protection Officers in the IPO are independent by law in the exercise of their international protection functions. They are also bound by confidentiality provisions in respect of applicants, as set out in Section 26 of the 2015 Act.

If an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to the Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

For your information, on 27 February 2017 the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015. The IPO statement in relation to the prioritisation of applications is available on their website (www.ipo.gov.ie).

Garda Data

794. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each district in the Dublin region that have been trained in use of a device (details supplied) and are currently carrying out such tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27693/17]

795. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each district that have been trained in use of a device (details supplied) and are currently carrying out such tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27694/17]

796. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of roadside drug tests carried out by county, by week to date in 2017; the number of drug tests carried out in Garda stations, by county, by week to date in 2017; the number of positives by county; the number that have progressed to blood test following a positive sample; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27695/17]

888. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary Question No. 145 of 4 April 2017, if the report from An Garda Síochána is now to hand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28980/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 794 to 796, inclusive, and 888 together.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda authorities and will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report.

While An Garda Síochána has been testing Irish drivers for drugs, with the assistance of the Medical Bureau of Road Safety (MBRS), since 1999, the Deputy will be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, commenced the drug driving provisions in the Road Traffic Act 2016 on 12 April 2017. One of the key measures in the legislation provides for Preliminary Drug Testing, which will enable Gardaí to test motorists at the roadside, whom they suspect of driving under the influence of drugs, and An Garda Síochána can now establish roadside checkpoints, known as Mandatory Impairment Checkpoints (MITs), to test drivers for the presence of both alcohol and drugs.

The new drug testing devices (Dräger DrugTest 5000) involve testing a sample of a driver's oral fluid (saliva) for the presence of cannabis, cocaine, opiates (e.g. heroin, morphine) and benzodiazepines (e.g. valium). The new devices will also be available in Garda stations. The MBRS has found that of the 3,020 specimens of blood and urine that it received in 2016, 24% confirmed positive for drugs other than alcohol. Of these, 91% were specimens from male drivers, most of whom were in the 17-44 year age range. Cannabis was the most prevalent drug detected, followed by benzodiazepines.

The MBRS recently informed me at the May meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety that a tender for new preliminary breath testing equipment is now live and it is hoped that all stages of the process will be completed by early 2018. New equipment, which is available in the market place, has the capacity to record the time, GPS location and number of persons breath-tested, and has the capacity to download the information automatically, reducing the chances of errors occurring in the data.

To support the introduction of Preliminary Drug Testing, I am advised that the Road Safety Authority is running a comprehensive online media campaign, targeting the use of illicit drugs in the 18 to 34 year old age bracket, to raise awareness of the new Garda drug-testing powers. This campaign will primarily feature videos which demonstrate how the drug tests will be administered on the road side and the consequences should a driver be detected driving under the influence of drugs. This awareness campaign will run on social media, radio and digital platforms. The Road Safety Authority is also running a parallel campaign, aimed at allaying the concerns of those taking medicines and driving (over the counter and prescription drugs). Specifically, the Road Safety Authority is putting information leaflets into pharmacies and doctors' surgeries nationwide.

It is estimated that drug driving is a factor in approximately one in ten fatal crashers. Drug driving not only puts the driver at risk but also passengers and other road users. The introduction of Preliminary Drug Testing strengthens the ability of Gardaí to tackle drug driving.

Proposed Legislation

797. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to legislate to reform the archaic laws of maintenance and champerty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27696/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will know, maintenance is the giving of financial assistance or encouragement to a party to litigation by a person who has neither an interest in the litigation nor any motive recognised by the law as justifying interference and champerty is an aggravated form of maintenance as it involves the support of litigation by a non-party in return for a share of the proceeds. The Statute Law Revision Act 2007 specifically retained in existence, in Irish Law, the torts and offences of maintenance and champerty.

Under current law, actions comprising maintenance and/or champerty in Ireland are considered to be contrary to public policy in that inter alia they may assist in the development of a market in legal claims thereby promoting litigation for the benefit of the promoter rather than the litigant and are considered to have the potential to create a substantial injustice to a defendant in an action. Maintenance and champerty are not permitted as a matter of Irish law regardless of the extent of the control exercised over the conduct of the litigation by the funder. On 23 May 2017 the Supreme Court confirmed, in its consideration of an earlier High Court ruling in the case of *Persona Digital Telephony Ltd. and others v The Minister for Public Enterprise, Attorney General and others*, that professional third party funding continues to offend against the rules of maintenance and champerty. At the same time, I am aware that the Supreme Court also took the opportunity on that occasion to raise some broader aspects of the policy approach to this area including in terms of the potential for new legislation.

I am also aware that some change has been taking place under the law in other jurisdictions and that this has generated public debate. For example, the torts and crimes of maintenance and champerty were abolished in England and Wales under the Criminal Law Act of 1967 and I am also aware that a number of States in Australia have since followed suit. In contrast, however, I note that New Zealand has favoured the retention of maintenance and champerty, a position which would be more aligned with current public policy in this jurisdiction.

Clearly, any change to public policy in relation to maintenance and champerty would require detailed and balanced consideration. I am, therefore, pleased to note the publication by the Law Reform Commission in June 2016 of its Issues Paper on “Contempt of Court and Other Offences and Torts Involving the Administration of Justice”. Under Issue 6 of that paper, the Commission has opened up the retention of the crimes and torts of maintenance and champerty to public consultation along with the related question of whether third-party funding of litigation should be permitted. As with the recent judgement of the Supreme Court to which I have referred, any report and recommendations that come to be made by the Law Reform Commission in relation to maintenance and champerty will be fully considered by my Department and by the Government in due course.

Departmental Expenditure

798. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27713/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm that my department has not engaged the services of the company referred to by the Deputy during the period January 2011 to date.

In respect of bodies operating under the aegis of my department, I am informed that the Legal Aid Board paid €20,584.71 in 2013 to the company referred to by the Deputy for consultancy on a research project.

Naturalisation Applications

799. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a stamp 4 visa for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27742/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is currently registered in the State under Stamp 3 conditions. INIS has no record of an application being received from this person requesting a change of status on family dependency grounds to a Stamp 4.

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

Drugs Seizures

800. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a reply to parliamentary Question No. 112 of 23 February 2017 will issue from An Garda Síochána. [27745/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the information requested is not available from An Garda Síochána at this time. However, I will provide the information as soon as I receive the report from the Garda authorities on the matter raised and will write to the Deputy again.

Naturalisation Applications

801. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a visa for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27823/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned made applications for a residence card, under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015, on 29 January 2016.

I am further informed that these applications are currently under consideration at INIS. It is anticipated that decisions regarding the specified applications will issue shortly.

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

Garda Vetting of Personnel

802. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HSE Garda vetting unit has advised this Deputy that they will not be carrying out garda vetting on transport providers or drivers in view of the fact that they are not direct employees of the HSE; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that it has advised that it is up to the transport providers to supply garda vetting to the HSE when contracts are being signed; the options available to persons that will be working with the HSE but will not be direct employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27928/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Garda Authorities that in accordance with the provisions of section 12 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 it is a matter for a relevant organisation, in this case the HSE, entering into a contract for services for relevant work to secure vetting disclosures.

Brexit Issues

803. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the countries covered in the British-Irish visa scheme or other visa schemes Ireland has in conjunction with the UK with third countries; and the dates at which the agreements are due to expire. [27929/17]

804. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or his officials have met with her UK counterpart to discuss the impact of Brexit on the British-Irish visa scheme; his views on whether Brexit will invalidate the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27930/17]

805. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department is examining the possibility of a new visa free entry scheme with China and India in view of the threats to the British-Irish visa scheme posed by Brexit. [27931/17]

807. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his officials have met with their UK counterparts to discuss the impact of Brexit on the Irish short stay visa waiver programme; his views on whether Brexit will invalidate the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28111/17]

808. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is exploring the possibility of a new visa free entry scheme (details supplied) in view of the threats to the Irish short stay visa waiver programme posed by Brexit. [28112/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Ques-

tions Nos. 803 to 805, inclusive, 807 and 808 together.

The British Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS) is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding drawn up between my Department and the UK Home Office. Its purpose is two fold – firstly, to make it easier for short stay travellers, including those coming for tourism and business, to visit both Ireland and the UK (and the North and South of the Island) without the need for two separate visas; secondly, it enhances the security of the Common Travel Area through sharing of biometric and biographical data in respect of the applicants from the countries that are part of the scheme.

It is also important to note that the visa regime in Ireland (and the UK) is a national competency as neither of our countries participate in the border aspects of the Schengen Acquis. Thus, it would not be expected to directly feature in any article 50 negotiations.

I should point out that in the context of ‘Brexit’, while it is not possible at this juncture to say what arrangements will apply between the UK and the EU in general (as this will ultimately be a matter that will feature within the negotiation process), what I can make clear is that we will continue to maintain and enhance cooperation with the UK in relation to the operation of the Common Travel Area, including the operation of the visa regime.

Both the Irish and UK Governments have publicly declared their commitment to maintaining the Common Travel Area and to ensuring that there will be no return to a so-called ‘hard border’ on the island of Ireland. Furthermore, the EU Negotiation Guidelines adopted by the European Council on 29 April refer to the Union’s commitment to the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland including the aim of avoiding a hard border. The Guidelines also state that the Union should recognise existing bilateral agreements and arrangements between the UK and Ireland which are compatible with EU law.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the BIVS operates in China and India. There is no expiry period established for the Scheme. Rather, it is the intention to complete the formal evaluation of the Scheme very shortly and agree with the UK authorities on its future roll-out to other countries.

The BIVS builds on the success of Ireland’s Short Stay Visa Waiver Programme which was first introduced in 2011, and extended last October for a further five years to 31st October, 2021. The Programme allows nationals of the 18 countries listed in the table below to travel to Ireland for a short stay using a valid UK visit. This is an Irish initiative and is not reciprocated by the UK as it is expected that over time the BIVS will supersede the Waiver Programme. Again, it is not envisaged that the Brexit negotiations will impinge on these arrangements.

Short Stay Visa Waiver Programme countries:

Countries	-	-
Bahrain	Belarus	Bosnia and Herzegovina
India	Kazakhstan	Kuwait
Montenegro	Oman	People’s Republic of China
Qatar	Russian Federation	Saudi Arabia
Serbia	Thailand	Turkey
Ukraine	United Arab Emirates	Uzbekistan

Regular meetings to discuss immigration matters relating to the Common Travel Area, including the operation of visa arrangements between our jurisdictions, have taken place between my Department and the UK Home Office and these are scheduled to continue. Such meetings have included contact at both Ministerial and official level. This co-operation is indeed ex-

emplified by the operation of the British Irish Visa Scheme which has been a major success in attracting increased visitor numbers from the countries involved.

Appointments to State Boards

806. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if any former TDs have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the public appointments service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28218/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm that, following consultation with all bodies under the aegis of my department, no former TDs have been appointed to State boards under my remit by the Public Appointments Service.

Questions Nos. 807 and 808 answered with Question No. 803.

Tribunals of Inquiry

809. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has discussed the status of investigations by An Garda Síochána and the Director of Public Prosecutions into the findings of the Moriarty tribunal with the Garda Commissioner or with other persons in her Department in 2017; the stage these investigations are at; the timeframe for a decision to be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27945/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are ongoing contacts between my Department and the Garda authorities in relation to the matters in question, so as to ensure that the Department is updated on any significant developments. I am advised that relevant liaison is maintained by Gardai with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The Deputy will appreciate that investigations of the matters in question may involve very extensive interviews and enquiries. While I do of course appreciate public concern about these matters, I am advised that the overriding concern for An Garda Síochána is to ensure that these investigations are carried out as comprehensively and effectively as possible.

As the Deputy is aware, the consideration of any criminal investigations is clearly a matter for the Garda authorities, and likewise it is a matter for the DPP to decide, independently, if any charges should be brought. It is not open to me, as Minister, to set deadlines in relation to these matters and it would be most inappropriate to attempt to go into the detail of ongoing Garda inquiries.

Protected Disclosures

810. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the provisions in place for an appointed protected disclosures contact person in the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27979/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Prison Service Protected Disclosures Policy was approved on 31 March 2015. The policy outlines that a worker can make a protected disclosure directly to the Head of Internal Audit in the Department of Justice and Equality. The Irish Prison Service Policy is due for review this year and all aspects of the policy will be considered in the light of learnings over the past two years.

Naturalisation Applications

811. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27981/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person mentioned by the Deputy made an application to INIS, in June 2016, for permission to remain in the State as the spouse of an Irish National.

I understand that this application is currently being processed and a request for documentation was issued to the person concerned in early June 2017. A decision will issue in a timely manner on receipt of the requested documentation.

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.

Visa Applications

812. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the waiting time for a person who has applied for a visa and is married to an Irish citizen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27982/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the current processing time in the Visa Office in Dublin for a visa application to join an Irish spouse is a little under five months. Applications processed in the seven Visa Offices abroad generally have a shorter processing time.

The Policy Document on Family Reunification first published in December, 2013 contains a stated business target that visa applications to join Irish citizens should be dealt with within six months of receipt of application. However, it should be noted that this is a business target and does not constitute a legal obligation. The business target reflects the detailed and often complex assessment that is required in applications for family reunification.

While the Visa Office endeavours to have applications of this nature processed as quickly as possible, processing times for visas may vary based on a number of factors such as the number of applications, individual circumstances, the complexity of applications, whether further information or investigation is required, and the resources available. Any delay in meeting the business target in particular cases is usually associated with the need for additional documentation or where a detailed assessment of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights is required.

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

response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited .

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

Naturalisation Applications

813. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average waiting time for a person who has applied for a stamp 5 work permit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27983/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the average processing time for a Without Condition As To Time endorsement, also known as Stamp 5, is 3 - 6 months depending on the individual circumstances of each application. Applicants who believe that they meet the qualification criteria, including those seeking a renewal, are advised to apply for the endorsement 6 months before their current permission to remain expires.

The Deputy may wish to note that work permits are associated with a Stamp 1.

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

Irish Prison Service

814. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28026/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the matter referred to by the Deputy relates to the circumstances surrounding the release of a prisoner from Mountjoy female Prison in May 2010 and subsequent internal operational inquiry. By way of clarification, I wish to point out that this inquiry was not a disciplinary investigation into the actions of any individual officer including the subject of this question.

As per my response to Parliamentary Question No. 96 of 28 March 2017, the inquiry in question was solely an operational matter and it was never envisaged that it would be published or furnished to any party to the inquiry. However, I note the concerns expressed by the person concerned and I am advised that arrangements are being finalised to notify the relevant parties of the conclusion of the internal inquiry.

Garda Deployment

815. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of retired gardaí who are working on a contract basis for An Garda Síochána; the tasks being undertaken by these former members; the annual cost incurred; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [28032/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there are 5 retired members of An Garda Síochána who are currently contracted to work in the organisation with the titles of: Archivist (1); Armourer (1); ISO Quality Manager (1); and Temporary Senior Administrative Assistant (2). The associated Annual Gross Salary Cost is €249,718.

Legislative Process

816. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28033/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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.

Courts Service Administration

817. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a review of the administration of justice which has been proposed by the President of the High Court has commenced; the details of this review including its terms of reference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28034/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, on 22 March 2017 the Tánaiste and then Minister for Justice and Equality announced that a Group, to be chaired by the President of the High Court Mr. Justice Peter Kelly, would be set up to review and reform the administration of civil justice in the State.

The aim of the review is to examine the current administration of civil justice in the State with a view to:

- (a) Improving access to justice;
- (b) Reducing the cost of litigation including costs to the State;
- (c) Improving procedures and practices so as to ensure timely hearings;
- (d) The removal of obsolete, unnecessary or over-complex rules of procedure;
- (e) Reviewing the law of discovery;
- (f) Encouraging alternative methods of dispute resolution;
- (g) Reviewing the use of electronic methods of communications including e-litigation;
- (h) Examining the extent to which pleadings and submissions and other court documents

should be available or accessible on the internet;

(i) Identifying steps to achieve more effective outcomes for court users with particular emphasis on vulnerable court users including children and young persons, impecunious litigants who ineligible for civil legal aid and wards of court.

It will take into account the body of work and range of initiatives already developed such as the 2010 report of the Law Reform Commission on Consolidation and Reform of the Courts as well as the legal costs provisions of the Legal Services Regulatory Act 2015 among others.

My Department, having lead overall responsibility for courts policy matters and for courts legislation, is currently in discussions with the President of the High Court regarding the composition and logistics of the Group. An initial preliminary meeting of the Group, which is intended to include representatives from my Department, the Courts Service, the Bar Council and the Law Society, is expected to be held in July 2017.

Garda Civilian Staff Data

818. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of civilians working in An Garda Síochána; the steps he is taking to meet her target of 4,000 civilians by 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28035/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The most recent available figure for the number of civilians working in An Garda Síochána is for 30 April 2017, at which point there were 2,098 civilian staff members working throughout the organisation carrying out senior management, administrative and technical roles.

As part of its Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána, the Government has agreed an overall vision for a Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 to include 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. This very substantial investment in personnel is driven by our commitment to ensure all citizens have the reassurance of a visible, responsive and effective policing service. The projected number of 4,000 civilians will effectively double the current figure and represents a medium-term target of a Garda organisation 20% comprised of civilians. That will bring An Garda Síochána, currently 14% comprised of civilians, more in line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff.

The 20% target will be achieved through a twin-track approach of, firstly, a “civilian by default” policy to be adopted in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant and, secondly, the redeployment of Gardaí and backfilling by suitably qualified civilians where necessary. In its ‘Changing Policing in Ireland’ report, the Garda Inspectorate has estimated that there may be up to 1,250 Gardaí currently in such posts and the Government’s plan aims to return as many of these Gardaí as possible to front-line duties over the next five years. With this in mind, the Garda Commissioner, in conjunction with the Policing Authority, has been requested to identify posts suitable for redeployment and to prepare a 5 year plan for reaching the 20% medium term target.

Funding for the recruitment of up to 500 civilians has been provided in Budget 2017 to facilitate the Commissioner in addressing capacity and critical skills gaps across the organisation including in corporate supports, change management, human resources and financial management at the national, regional and Divisional level. These appointments are intended to facilitate

deeper civilianisation in the coming years.

To date, the Policing Authority (with the consent of the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) has approved 137 of these positions including two new senior posts of Executive Director Strategy and Change Management and Executive Director Legal and Compliance. The Government has also agreed in principle to the positions of a Chief Information Officer. The majority of the positions sanctioned are in the areas of ICT, Human Resources, Governance and Strategy, Legal and Compliance, and Finance. 43 of the initial 137 sanctioned posts will go towards back filling vacancies created by the re-deployment of Garda members to policing duties. Garda management has indicated that some 30% of the total 500 civilians to be recruited this year will lead to redeployment opportunities.

Garda Reserve

819. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Reserves; the steps he is taking to meet her target of 2,000 Garda Reserve members by 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28036/17]

826. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Reserve personnel in service. [28070/17]

874. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding his plans to recruit 300 Garda Reserves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28608/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 819, 826 and 874 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the recruitment and training of the Garda Reserve is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

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

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

It is regrettable that there has been a substantial reduction in the strength of the Reserve in recent years from a peak of 1,164 in 2013 to 649 as of 30 April, 2017. The fall-off arises from a range of factors, not least the lifting in 2014 of the moratorium on recruitment of trainee Gardaí which has affected Reserve numbers in two ways - firstly some 200 serving Reserves have successfully applied to become trainee Gardaí, and secondly, resources in both An Garda Síochána and in the Public Appointment Service have been focused on delivering an accelerated programme of recruitment of full time members of An Garda Síochána. I am sure that the Deputy will agree, notwithstanding the very valuable contribution of Reserve members throughout the country, that it was the right decision, with finite resources, to prioritise the running of recruitment campaigns to replenish the full-time ranks of An Garda Síochána over the last three years. With the plan to reach 15,000 Garda members well on track it was possible for the Commissioner and the Public Appointments Service to undertake a new recruitment campaign for

Garda Reserves. That is now in train and will, allowing for the selection process and necessary training of successful candidates, facilitate a start to be made on strengthening of the Reserve across every Garda Division, in the coming years.

Reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and it is important that as we expand the Reserve we build on their contribution to the policing of communities right across the country and ensure that they are used to optimum effect. In this regard, I am informed that An Garda Síochána is completing an audit of the experience and skills of Reserves which, when completed will assist Garda management in considering the future role to be played by the Reserve including whether additional powers should be conferred on Reserve members.

Direct Provision System

820. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when self-catering facilities will be in operation in a centre (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28064/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department is working closely with the Office of Public Works (OPW) on this matter and communal catering facilities will be introduced at the centre in question as soon as possible.

The Programme for Partnership Government outlines the government's commitment to reforming the system, with particular focus on families and children. This follows on from the recommendation from the McMahon Report which stated that all families should have access to cooking facilities (whether in a self-contained unit or through use of a communal kitchen).

Direct Provision System

821. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will define self-catering facilities in direct provision centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28065/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): There are two accommodation centres being used by my Department for the accommodation of persons in the protection process which can be classified as "self-catering". Persons accommodated in these centres are provided with accommodation for themselves and, if appropriate, their families. They are paid a higher rate of payment by the Department of Social Protection than persons in other accommodation centres. However they are responsible for the provision and cooking of their own food and light and heat. Laundry and rent expenses continue to be paid for by the State. In all other respects they are generally entitled to the same benefits (such as medical card and exemption from prescription charges) as other persons in the protection process.

There is also a system of independent living available to residents in Mosney and Ballyhannis and this will be extended in due course to other accommodation centres in accordance with the Programme for a Partnership Government. In these centres residents are able to acquire food and other products through a food hall and prepare meals for their families as they wish. Residents in other centres are provided with food in a communal setting. All other services in State provided accommodation centres are provided by the relevant contractor as part of the contract with my Department.

Student Data

822. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of international students registered with the Garda National Immigration Bureau between 2005 and 2011; the top five nationalities in each year; the respective numbers of registrations of each in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28066/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A significant amount of the statistical data requested by the Deputy was provided in response to Parliamentary Questions 677 and 678 dated 6th June 2012. A copy of that reply is reproduced below.

It would take a disproportionate amount of staff resource time to extract the breakdown of nationalities by year as requested by the Deputy. However, I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the top five nationalities of international students for the years in question include China, Brazil, India, Mauritius and Pakistan.

Response to PQs on 6th June 2012.

Statistics on non-EEA student registration are available from 2006. The total number of registrations on student immigration permission was 32,876 in 2006; 39,720 in 2007; 44,942 in 2008; 45,518 in 2009; 45,460 in 2010; and 46,509 in 2011. It should be noted that these figures cover both existing permissions carried over from the previous year. Students on visits of less than 90 days, however, are not included as such persons are not required to register.

At present, it is not possible to accurately differentiate between the different education sectors and levels. The Deputy will be aware that the new immigration regime for full-time non-EEA students was introduced in January 2011 and that before this date, the Internationalisation Register of courses was not categorised into Degree courses and Language or Non-Degree Courses.

However, an analysis of the student records carried out in March 2012 provides a breakdown of non-EEA students with reference to the type of course students are registered as attending. Approximately 28% of students are undertaking English language courses, 20% non-degree programmes; and 40% degree programmes. The remaining 11% includes students at secondary level, students on Graduate Schemes and those on Timed Out student permission.

Student Data

823. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received under the 2004 student probationary extension; the number of those which were successful; the top five nationalities of applicants, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28067/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Student Probationary Extension Scheme was one of a number of transitional measures included in the package of student immigration reforms which were introduced from January 2011. The Scheme allowed qualifying persons (i.e. those who had a valid student permission to be in Ireland and who had begun their educational course prior to 1 January 2005) to apply for a more permanent immigration permission following a two year probationary period. Two thousand seven hundred and seventy six (2,776) persons were admitted to the scheme of which two thousand three hundred and ninety three (2,393) were successful. Information was not directly collected on the nationality of the persons admitted to the scheme and it would therefore constitute a disproportionate

use of time and resources to provide the information sought on the nationalities of applicants.

International Conventions

824. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the future domestic steps which need to be taken in order for Ireland to ratify the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence; when Ireland will ratify same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28068/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This Government is totally committed to tackling domestic violence, as am I as Minister for Justice and Equality.

The Programme for Government commits to full implementation of the Istanbul Convention. This Convention is a significant legal instrument in tackling violence against women and domestic violence. Many of the actions required by provisions in the Istanbul Convention are being implemented on a daily basis under current legislation and administrative practice. The 18 actions necessary to ratify the Istanbul Convention are contained in the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021, published in January, 2016.

A number of actions are completed. Of the outstanding actions six are administrative including public sector training/education by a range of State agencies, the development of a Risk Assessment Matrix by An Garda Síochána, commissioning of a national helpline service to respond to issues of domestic and sexual violence, and support for child witnesses. Work on implementing these actions is progressing on schedule to be implemented by the end of 2017.

The remaining actions are legislative and require delivery of three pieces of legislation:

i) The Domestic Violence Bill which was published on 3 February 2017 and is at Committee Stage in the Seanad. The Bill is a key action towards ratifying the Istanbul Convention and its enactment will deliver four Istanbul actions.

ii) The Victims Bill (which delivers one action) passed Committee Stage in May of this year.

iii) The one remaining legislative action is the enactment of legislation for extraterritorial jurisdiction. Work on this action is underway in order to meet the timescale for this action which is quarter 4 2017.

When the required actions are implemented, Ireland will be in a position to ratify the Convention. The intended timeframe for this is Q1 2018.

Garda Data

825. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in service; the number in training; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28069/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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 Garda Commissioner that on 30 April 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available, the strength of An Garda Síochána was 13,156.

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

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. I am also informed that as of 6 June 2017 there are 605 student Gardaí attending the Garda College for phase 1 training who are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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.

Question No. 826 answered with Question No. 819.

Prisoner Data

827. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average age of the life sentence prisoners committed to prison in 2016; the average age of the life sentence prisoners released in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28110/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to inform Deputy that the average age of persons committed to prison in 2016 for a life sentence of imprisonment starting in 2016 is 29 years. The average age of prisoners serving a life sentence released into the community in 2016 on licence under the supervision of the Probation Service is 54.5 years.

The IPS works in close partnership with the Probation Service and An Garda Síochána in respect of the management of life sentenced prisoners who are living in the community. A range of temporary release conditions are applied which, if not adhered to, may result in the prisoner being returned to custody.

Postal Codes

828. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28143/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm that there were no additional costs involved in upgrading information and communications systems and databases in my Department to facilitate the use of Eircodes. This work was carried out by staff in my Department's ICT Division as part of routine systems updates.

Question No. 829 answered with Question No. 731.

Prison Service Staff

830. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prison clerical officers employed by the Prison Service currently; the number employed in each prison; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28229/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Prison Service that the total number of permanent Prison Clerical Officers employed by the Irish Prison Service, as at 31 May 2017, is 86. The breakdown is contained in the table below.

Location	Number of PCOs
Cloverhill	12
Wheatfield	5
Mountjoy	14
Portlaoise	3
Midlands	13
Arbour Hill	2
Castlerea	7
Cork	8
Limerick	7
Loughan	3
Shelton	2
Prison Service Escort Corps	2
Operational Support Group	1
Central Purchasing Unit	4
Building Services Division	1
Irish Prison Service College	2
Total	86

Prison Service Staff

831. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason prison clerical officers do not receive a rent allowance payment as other Prison Service employees receive; if he envisages a policy change in regard to providing this payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28230/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that rent allowance is payable to serving members of An Garda Síochána, Firefighters and Prison Officers. Prison Clerical Officers are employed in line with the general Civil Service Clerical Officer grade and associated terms and conditions of employment, and as such would not receive rent allowance.

International Conventions

832. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps the Government is taking to ensure that Ireland complies with its international legal responsibilities regarding judicial corruption relative to Article II of the UN convention against corruption; if legislation or regulations will be introduced to prevent an organisation (details supplied) from mandatorily making a Superior Court judge a bencher upon their taking their judicial seal of office or that would prohibit serving judges from being members of a society; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28240/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The relevant Article of the Convention to which the Deputy refers also refers to the taking of measures which would include rules with respect to the conduct of members of the judiciary. I am happy to inform the Deputy that the Judicial Council Bill was published on 1 June 2017. This Bill envisages both the establishment of a Judicial Council and a Judicial Conduct Committee. The function of the Judicial Conduct Committee, which will have a number of members who are not judges, will be to promote and maintain high standards of conduct among judges. One of the tasks of the Judicial Conduct Committee will be, not later than 12 months after its establishment, to prepare and submit draft guidelines concerning judicial conduct and ethics for adoption by the Judicial Council. The Committee will also have a role in providing advice to an individual judge or to judges generally on these matters.

At present, under the Prevention of Corruption Acts, 1889 to 2010, Irish judges are included in a list of public officials to which certain corruption offences apply. These offences include the corruption in office offence under section 8 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act 2001, as well as the offences of general active and passive corruption under section 2 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act 2001 and section 2 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act 2010. Penalties for these offences include a term of imprisonment up to 10 years and/or an unlimited fine upon conviction.

In addition to the current statutory provisions, I will shortly bring forward new legislation that will repeal the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 to 2010 and replace and expand upon the offences and presumptions contained in those Acts. The Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Bill will provide for significant terms of imprisonment, unlimited fines and additional penalties including forfeiture of, and exclusion from, office in the case of certain officials. The Bill will give better effect to the main requirements of a number of international anti-corruption instruments which Ireland has already ratified, including the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

Garda Stations

833. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a Garda station (details supplied); the number of additional personnel that are being assigned to the station; the area they are coming from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28270/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Units and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. 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.

Cootehill forms part of the Cavan/Monaghan. I am further informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Cavan/Monaghan Division, on 30 April 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 319, 6 of whom were assigned to Cootehill Garda Station. There are also 13 Garda Reserves and 36 civilians attached to the 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. I understand that the potential for Cootehill station to cater for additional members is currently under consideration by the Garda authorities.

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 to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 21 of whom have been assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

Garda Stations

834. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a new Garda station (details supplied); the stage at which development is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28272/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has primary responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation and works closely with the Garda authorities in this regard. As Minister, I have no role in these matters.

You will also be aware that the Garda Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021 which was

announced on 21 October 2015 includes the development of a new Garda station at Bailieborough, Co. Cavan.

I understand that following consultation between Garda management and the OPW, a site has been identified for the new Garda Station and the OPW advises that it is progressing the legal matters relating to the acquisition of the site. The OPW further advises that, while significant progress has been made on the legal aspects of the acquisition, it is not currently possible to confirm exactly when this process will be completed.

Standards in Public Office Commission

835. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if every member of An Garda Síochána that is required to make an annual declaration under SIPO legislation has done so since the legislation has required them to do so; and the details of this by individual year, rank and name, in tabular form. [28326/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It has not been possible within the time available to compile the information necessary to answer the questions but I will convey the information to the Deputy when it becomes available.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including personnel matters and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

Mutual Assistance Requests

836. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of mutual assistance legal requests received from overseas Governments as part of investigations into money laundering from 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28334/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The number of mutual assistance requests received from other States arising from criminal investigations recorded as relating to money laundering, from 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017 is set out in the table below.

Year	Offence
2007	29
2008	21
2009	18
2010	27
2011	40
2012	26
2013	37
2014	43
2015	35
2016	27
2017 (13 June)	13

The Criminal Justice (Mutual Assistance) Act 2008 as amended which came into effect

on the 1st of September 2008, was enacted in order to incorporate into Irish law a number of conventions, agreements and protocols in relation to mutual assistance. The Act includes provisions dealing with the procurement of information in relation to financial transactions for criminal investigation purposes and freezing, confiscation and forfeiture of property. Prior to the enactment of the 2008 Act, the Criminal Justice Act, 1994 gave effect to the Council of Europe's Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters 1959. Part IV of that Act deals with the issue of money laundering.

While every attempt has been made to provide the Deputy with accurate statistics in relation to this matter, it should be noted that many of the criminal investigations giving rise to individual mutual legal assistance requests deal with a multiplicity of criminal activity. Consequently, some requests which may contain a money laundering element may have been classified under a different category of criminal conduct for recording purposes where the latter conduct comprises the primary reason for the making of the request.

Immigration Status

837. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status, including eligibility to obtain citizenship, in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28363/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 6 August 2018, is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion but I understand however that the case is due to be submitted for decision in the near future.

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

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

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

Deportation Orders Re-examination

838. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to date and pending in regard to residency in the case of a person (details supplied); if their case to deport can be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28364/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A Deportation Order was signed in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy on 13 May 2016. Leave was granted by the High Court on 27 June 2016 to take Judicial Review proceedings seeking to quash the Deportation Order. Accordingly, as the matter is *sub judice*, I do not propose to comment further. The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

839. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); if the person is eligible to apply for naturalisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28366/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

The records show that the person's permission to reside expired on 13 June 2017. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times and failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation. The individual concerned should apply to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department to have her permission renewed.

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

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

Residency Permits

840. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and-or expected eligibility in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28367/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Services (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned applied for a right of residency accompanied by a right to work based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child.

I am informed that the person concerned was requested to provide reliable DNA evidence confirming the child's entitlement to Irish citizenship. DNA evidence is requested in circumstances where (i) doubts exist as to a particular child's entitlement to claim Irish citizenship and (ii) doubts exist as to the biological relationship between a child and parent. It is a measure used by INIS, on a regular basis, to ensure that the integrity of the State's immigration system is protected.

The onus is on individual applicants to obtain such DNA evidence in cases where, without it, they cannot satisfy the INIS as to the parentage of an Irish citizen child. While my Department cannot compel any person to obtain DNA evidence to prove parentage of an Irish citizen child, it may refuse to grant a right of residency in circumstances where it is not satisfied as to the child's entitlement to Irish citizenship.

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

Residency Permits

841. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and-or expected eligibility for long term residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28368/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

The position in relation to the immigration status of Long Term Residency is that, at the date of application, a person applying for such status must have been legally resident in the State for over five years (60 months) on the basis of work permit, work authorisation or working visa conditions and, as such, must have Stamp 1 or Stamp 4 endorsements on their passport during such periods. Given that the person concerned has no current right of residency in the State, they would clearly not be in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to persons applying to my Department for Long Term Residency status.

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

Naturalisation Certificates

842. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the various stages already undertaken regarding the determination of entitlement to residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28371/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has Stamp 4 permission to reside in the State until 10 February 2020, is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion.

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

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

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

Residency Permits

843. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedures followed to date in the determination of eligibility for residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28372/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The International Protection Act, 2015, was commenced on 31 December 2016. Under the Act, a new single application procedure was introduced under which all aspects of a person's claim (asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain) are considered together by the International Protection Office (IPO) rather than sequentially as heretofore. The IPO replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from the commencement date. The Chief International Protection Officer (CIPO) and the International Protection Officers in the IPO are independent by law in the exercise of their international protection functions. They are also bound by confidentiality provisions in respect of applicants, as set out in Section 26 of the 2015 Act.

If an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to the Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

For your information, on 27 February 2017 the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015. The IPO statement in relation to the prioritisation of applications is available on their website

(www.ipa.gov.ie).

Immigration Status

844. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28373/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a recent request from the person concerned, based on their changed circumstances, is under consideration.

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

Immigration Status

845. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current residency status and potential eligibility for long term residency naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); when the process is likely to be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28374/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 9 October 2017, is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been established specifically for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on

such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

846. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status and the potential eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28375/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned entered the State on 29 October 2007 and made an asylum application on 14 November 2007. This application was refused, at appeal, on 2 September 2010.

On 11 May 2011, the person concerned made an application for a residence card as a family member of an EU citizen. They asserted at that time that they had married a British citizen in the State on 21 January 2011. Following a consideration of the information and documentation submitted, the person concerned was informed on 10 November 2011 that their application had been granted and that they were to be provided with permission to remain in the State on a Stamp 4EUFam basis.

It subsequently came to light that the spouse of the person concerned was no longer residing in the State, having taken up employment in the United Kingdom. The person concerned was provided with an opportunity to make representations in respect of this matter, and they confirmed that their spouse had been unable to obtain employment in this jurisdiction so had relocated to the United Kingdom. On foot of this, and in light of the fact that the EU citizen was no longer exercising their EU Treaty Rights in the State, the person concerned was informed on 18 October 2016 that their residence card had been revoked.

On 2 November 2016, the person concerned requested a review of this decision. Their representations in this connection have been placed on file, as have several documents submitted in respect of the EU citizen's current situation. The Deputy may be assured that the review of the decision to revoke the permission provided to the person concerned will be considered as soon as possible. The person concerned will be contacted should any further issues arise in respect of their application.

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

Naturalisation Applications

847. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will examine the case for residency entitlement eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28376/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, notifications have issued to the persons concerned pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

All representations received, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

The Deputy should note that as the persons concerned have no current right of residency in the State, they would not be in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to persons applying to my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation.

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

Visa Applications

848. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an appeal in respect of a decision to refuse a visa application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28378/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the application referred to was refused on appeal by the Visa Office in Dublin. The decision was communicated to the sponsor and applicant on 2 June 2017.

It is open to the applicant to submit a fresh visa application at any time. However he should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to him and be in a position to address these in a new application.

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

Family Reunification Applications

849. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which an application for family reunification will be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28379/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 20th June, 2002.

The Deputy might wish to note that persons the subject of a Deportation Order are obliged

to remove themselves from the State and to remain out of the State.

Representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 25th April, 2016.

Further representations have now been received from the legal representative of the person concerned, again pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), again requesting the revocation of the Deportation Order. This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be that the existing Deportation Order will be either 'revoked' or 'affirmed'. Once such a decision has been made, this will be notified in writing.

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

Residency Permits

850. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will, on compassionate grounds, offer residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28380/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that applications for the persons concerned are being considered. However, INIS had not been informed of the change in circumstances as outlined by the Deputy. In order for the case to be examined further the applicant and/or their family should be advised to write to Residence Unit 2 of INIS updating them of the change in circumstances.

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

Naturalisation Applications

851. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will approve naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28381/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position remains as outlined in response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No. 41 of 2 March 2017. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an

application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was deemed ineligible for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 23 May 2016.

The records show that the person's permission to reside expired on 22 November 2016. All non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times and failure to do so may adversely affect an application for a certificate of naturalisation.

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

852. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will facilitate long term residency naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28382/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the records show that the person referred to currently has permission to reside in the State, on a Stamp 4 until 22 September 2019, which entitles her to avail of employment. There is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy,

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

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

Immigration Status

853. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expected

residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28383/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The International Protection Act, 2015, was commenced on 31 December 2016. Under the Act, a new single application procedure was introduced under which all aspects of a person's claim (asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain) are considered together by the International Protection Office (IPO) rather than sequentially as heretofore. The IPO replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from the commencement date. The Chief International Protection Officer (CIPO) and the International Protection Officers in the IPO are independent by law in the exercise of their international protection functions. They are also bound by confidentiality provisions in respect of applicants, as set out in Section 26 of the 2015 Act.

If an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant should contact the International Protection Office directly either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to the Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

For your information, on 27 February 2017 the Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015. The IPO statement in relation to the prioritisation of applications is available on their website (www.ipo.gov.ie).

Sexual Offences Data

854. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of incidents of rape and sexual assault which have been reported as occurring within direct provision centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28408/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Neither the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) nor my Department gathers, holds or maintains any such statistics. All such criminal matters should be reported to An Garda Síochána so that investigations into any alleged offences against the person can take place as quickly as possible.

Immigration Data

855. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of adults and children that have been granted their stamp 4 visa or leave to remain that remain in direct provision or other non permanent accommodation funded by his department on the first day of each month in 2016 and to date in 2017. [28478/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Details of the numbers of persons with a form of status who continue to reside in State provided accommodation are not available on a monthly basis for 2016. What can be said is that the numbers of persons with some form of status residing in State provided accommodation ranged from approximately 450 persons to approximately 600 persons during 2016. The numbers rise and fall as some residents are granted a form of status and others with status move into the community. Over 1,900 persons left the State provided accommodation system during 2016. It is important to note that not all those leaving State provided accommodation would have done so because they received a form of status. The State provided accommodation system is entirely voluntary and some of

those leaving the system were exercising their right to live elsewhere.

The collation of information regarding the number of persons with status who had come through the normal protection process is available on a monthly basis from January 2017 and the Reception and Integration Agency will continue to collate this information on an ongoing basis. The table below sets out the information requested by the Deputy:

Month	Number of those with a form of status
January 2017	532
February 2017	454
March 2017	421
April 2017	415
May 2017	396
to date in June 2017	399

Private Security Authority Administration

856. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the new private security appeals board will be appointed; the reason for the delay in appointing the board; and when it will reach a decision on the case of a person (details supplied). [28485/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Private Security Appeal Board is established in accordance with the provisions of Part 5 of the Private Security Services Act 2004. The Government appointed the current Board on 2 May 2017. The process for the appointment of the Board was conducted in accordance with the relevant guidelines but took longer than had been anticipated to complete. The Deputy will appreciate that in accordance with the provisions of the 2004 Act the Board is independent in the performance of its functions. I have been informed that at its recent meeting the Board considered the case of the person to whom the Deputy refers and that it will correspond directly with the person in early course.

Garda Compensation

857. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a garda compensation case (details supplied). [28486/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm to the Deputy that two applications for compensation under the Garda Síochána (Compensation) Acts, 1941 and 1945, were made by the person concerned. Authorisations were granted to the claimant on 3rd October 2008 and on 15th November 2012, notifying the applicant's legal representative to proceed to the High Court for compensation in respect of each case.

Garda Reserve

858. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of recruiting additional Garda Reserve members (details supplied) in 2018; and the costs associated with training the additional Garda Reserve. [28523/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda personnel and resources, is a matter for the Garda Com-

missioner, and I as Minister, have no 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.

Garda Reserve

859. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda Reserve recruits expected to complete their training in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. [28524/17]

860. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the projected number of Garda Reserve in the force by the end of 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. [28525/17]

861. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of recruitment of sufficient Garda Reserve in 2018 to meet the 2,000 target in the programme for Government. [28526/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 859 to 861, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the recruitment and training of the Garda Reserve is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

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

This plan is progressing well. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves, 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to ensuring funding is available to allow sufficient recruitment into An Garda Síochána in 2018 and the coming years so that the planned overall Garda workforce of 21,000 is achieved.

It is regrettable that there has been a substantial reduction in the strength of the Reserve in recent years from a peak of 1,164 in 2013 to 649 as of 30 April, 2017. The fall-off arises from a range of factors, not least the lifting in 2014 of the moratorium on recruitment of trainee Gardaí which has affected Reserve numbers in two ways - firstly some 200 serving Reserves have successfully applied to become trainee Gardaí, and secondly, resources in both An Garda Síochána and in the Public Appointment Service have been focused on delivering an accelerated programme of recruitment of full time members of An Garda Síochána. I am sure that the Deputy will agree, notwithstanding the very valuable contribution of Reserve members throughout the country, that it was the right decision, with finite resources, to prioritise the running of recruitment campaigns to replenish the full-time ranks of An Garda Síochána over the last three years. With the plan to reach 15,000 Garda members well on track it was possible for the Commissioner and the Public Appointments Service to undertake a new recruitment campaign for Garda Reserves. That is now in train and will, allowing for the selection process and necessary training of successful candidates, facilitate a start to be made on strengthening of the Reserve across every Garda Division, in the coming years.

Reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and it is important that as we expand the Reserve we build on their contribution to the policing of communities right across the country and ensure that they are used to optimum effect. In this regard, I am informed that An Garda Síochána is completing an audit of the experience and skills of Reserves which, when completed will assist Garda management in considering the future role to be played by the Reserve including whether additional powers should be conferred on Reserve members.

Garda Civilian Staff Recruitment

862. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of recruiting additional civilian Garda members (details supplied) in 2018. [28527/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda personnel and resources, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister, have no 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.

Garda Civilian Staff Data

863. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda civilian members expected to complete their training in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. [28528/17]

864. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the projected number of Garda civilian members in the force by the end of 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. [28529/17]

865. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of recruitment of sufficient Garda civilian members in 2018 to meet the 4,000 target in the programme for Government. [28530/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 863 to 865, inclusive, together.

As part of its Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána, the Government has agreed an overall vision for a Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 to include 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. This very substantial investment in personnel is driven by our commitment to ensure all citizens have the reassurance of a visible, responsive and effective policing service.

The most recent available figure for the number of civilians working in An Garda Síochána is for 30 April 2017, at which point there were 2,098 civilian staff members working throughout the organisation carrying out senior management, administrative and technical roles. The projected number of 4,000 civilians will effectively double the current figure on an incremental basis and represents a medium-term target of a Garda organisation 20% comprised of civilians. That will bring An Garda Síochána, currently 14% comprised of civilians, more in line with international norms and ensure that trained Gardaí are not engaging in administrative and technical duties which could be done by suitably qualified civilian staff.

The 20% target will be achieved through a twin-track approach of, firstly, a “civilian by default” policy to be adopted in relation to the filling of all new posts other than operational policing posts and for non-operational policing posts that become vacant and, secondly, the redeployment of Gardaí and backfilling by suitably qualified civilians where necessary. In its ‘Changing Policing in Ireland’ report, the Garda Inspectorate has estimated that there may be up to 1,250 Gardaí currently in such posts and the Government’s plan aims to return as many of these Gardaí as possible to front-line duties over the next five years. With this in mind, the Garda Commissioner, in conjunction with the Policing Authority, has been requested to identify posts suitable for redeployment and to prepare a 5 year plan for reaching the 20% medium term target. This plan, with the consent of my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, will determine the number of civilians to be recruited in each of the coming years and the projected number of civilians for each year in order to reach the target of 4,000 civilians by 2021.

As a first step in this process, funding for the recruitment of up to 500 civilians has been provided in Budget 2017 to facilitate the Commissioner in addressing capacity and critical skills gaps across the organisation including in corporate supports, change management, human resources and financial management at the national, regional and Divisional level. These appointments are intended to facilitate deeper civilianisation in the coming years. To date, the Policing Authority (with the consent of the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) has approved 137 of these positions including two new senior posts of Executive Director Strategy and Change Management and Executive Director Legal and Compliance. The recruitment process for the Strategy and Change Management position has been completed and the name of the successful candidate passed to the Policing Authority which is the appointing body. The recruitment process for the legal and Compliance position is in train. The Government has also agreed in principle to the position of a Chief Information Officer. The majority of the positions sanctioned are in the areas of ICT, Human Resources, Governance and Strategy, Legal and Compliance, and Finance. 43 of the initial 137 sanctioned posts will go towards back filling vacancies created by the redeployment of Garda members to policing duties. Garda management has indicated that some 30% of the total 500 civilians to be recruited this year will lead to redeployment opportunities. In addition to these sanctioned posts, the Policing Authority have indicated to An Garda Síochána that consequential vacancies may be filled in the organisation.

Training for civilian members will vary from position to position depending on the nature of the role involved and continue throughout their career as the need arises and in order to aid continuous professional development. Unlike Garda members who must go through the full Garda training process, formal training courses are not necessarily a prerequisite for beginning work in civilian roles. Indeed one of the reasons for engaging civilians is that in many cases they already have the required professional expertise to undertake the role concerned within An Garda Síochána.

Garda Expenditure

866. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of recruiting additional Garda (details supplied) in 2018; and the costs associated with training the additional Garda. [28531/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the detailed allocation of Garda personnel and resources, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister, have no 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.

Garda Strength

867. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits expected to complete their training in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. [28532/17]

868. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the projected number of gardaí in the force by the end of 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. [28533/17]

869. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of intakes of new recruits the Garda College takes in each year; the dates on which this takes place; and the maximum number of recruits the Garda College can take in each of these intake periods. [28534/17]

870. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of recruitment of sufficient gardaí in 2018 to meet the 15,000 target in the programme for Government. [28535/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 867 to 870, inclusive, together.

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.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 by 2021 will require some 2,400 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next three years in addition to the 2,000 recruited that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014.

In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves. I am engaging with my colleague, the Minister Public Expenditure and Reform, in relation to ensuring funding is available to allow sufficient recruitment into An Garda Síochána in 2018 and the coming years so that the planned overall Garda workforce of 21,000 is achieved.

The workforce plan is progressing apace. So far this year, there have been two intakes of two hundred trainees in February and May with a further two intakes of 200 planned for August and November giving a total intake of 800. It is expected that the planned schedule of intakes will continue into 2018. I am advised by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016. In addition to this, a further 800 Garda trainees are expected to attest in 2018.

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

In relation to the capacity of the Garda College, I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the Garda College provides a range of training and development courses to members of An Garda Síochána and all new recruits complete their initial 32 week training programme at the College. The physical capacity of the College extends to 496 bedrooms, 16 Classrooms and 4 Lecture Theatres. The College has the capacity to accommodate the planned intakes of Garda trainees.

Drugs Seizures

871. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the quantity and value of each drug seizure in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28543/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that information relating to the quantity and value of drugs seized by An Garda Síochána is set out in the Annual Reports of An Garda Síochána. The Annual Reports for the years 2007 to 2015 are available on the website of An Garda Síochána (www.garda.ie). The information provided in the Reports is prepared on the basis of records maintained by Forensic Science Ireland based on the quantity of drugs analysed annually at its laboratory. The quantity and value of drugs seized by An Garda Síochána is available for years post 2011 inclusive, that is 2011 to 2015. Information on the quantities of drugs seized only is available for years prior to 2011, that is 2007 to 2010. I understand that work is continuing on the preparation of the Annual Report for 2016 which will be made available in due course.

Legal Aid Service

872. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is an approved list of solicitors which may be supplied by An Garda Síochána to persons in need of legal representation; the number of solicitors on it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28586/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It has not been possible, within the time available, to compile the information necessary to answer the Deputy's question but I will convey the information to the Deputy when it becomes available.

Garda Data

873. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bank accounts the Commissioner operates inside and outside the State respectively; the location of those bank accounts; and the function and-or purpose of bank accounts operated by the Commissioner that are outside the State (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28599/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for An Garda Síochána and is respon-

sible for the Garda Vote.

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

Question No. 874 answered with Question No. 819.

Parliamentary Questions Data

875. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Parliamentary Questions he has referred to An Garda Síochána for reply in each of the 12 months June 2016 to date in 2017; the time taken for a reply in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28636/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In line with Standing Order 42A, which was agreed during the course of the current Dáil, parliamentary questions may be referred to a body under the aegis of a Government Department for direct reply. The parliamentary question IT system used by the Department does not permit the database to be searched in such a way as to identify all questions which have been specifically so referred to An Garda Síochána so it is not possible to provide the information sought by the Deputy. In terms of the time taken for a reply in such cases, Standing Order 42A sets out a target of 10 working days after the question has been answered in the Dáil. As the length of time it takes for An Garda Síochána to respond to a question is dependent on a number of factors, including the complexity of the request, the volume of information sought and the level of coordination required to provide the requested information, it is not always possible to provide a complete answer within the timeframes set out by the Oireachtas. This remains the aim of my Department in relation to all parliamentary questions, however.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

876. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28673/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The information requested by the Deputy could not be compiled in the time available. I will write to the Deputy directly when the information is available.

Drugs Crime

877. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of weekly arrests per county to date for positive preliminary drug test results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28698/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters referred to in the Deputy's questions and I will contact the Deputy directly upon receipt of a Garda report.

Immigration Status

878. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if residency status can be granted in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28707/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned had no valid basis to remain in the State, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), was, by letter dated 8th May, 2017, notified that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. The person concerned was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making written representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them. Written representations have been submitted by the person concerned.

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

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

Direct Provision System

879. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the case of the continuing incarceration of a person (details supplied) living in direct provision in Clondalkin; the steps he will take to allow this person privacy of self catering accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28799/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I do not accept that any person who has sought or is seeking international protection is incarcerated in any State provided accommodation centre. Accommodation is offered to all persons applying for international protection and it is open to any persons to accept or refuse that offer. While residing in the accommodation centre in question all persons are provided with full board accommodation and have access to all State services. It is worth noting that the person in question is presently the subject of a deportation order having failed in his application for international protection and it is incumbent on him to comply with that order and vacate the State.

Commissioner of Valuation

880. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to review the work of the Commissioner of the Valuation Office; the examinations that are being done regarding the revaluation practice carried out by the office; the expected impact on SMEs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28805/17]

881. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of revaluations under the national revaluation programme carried out by the Commissioner of the Valuation Office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28806/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 880 and 881 together.

The Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 provide for the valuation of all commercial and industrial properties for rating purposes. The Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the performance of his functions under the Acts and the making of valuations for rating is his sole responsibility and I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in decisions in this regard. While I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no direct role in reviewing work done by the Commissioner of Valuation, I should point out that there is an extensive system of redress available to ratepayers who are dissatisfied with the proposed valuations or with any particular on the certificate relating to their property. A dissatisfied ratepayer may make representations to the Valuation Office within 40 days of the date of issue of the certificate. The Valuation Office will consider the representations and may or may not change the proposed valuation depending on the circumstances of each individual property. If a ratepayer is still dissatisfied with the valuation on the final certificate they receive, they then have a right to lodge a formal appeal with the Valuation Tribunal, which is an independent statutory body established for the purpose of hearing appeals against decisions of the Valuation Office.

Having a modern valuation base is very important for the levying of commercial rates on a fair and equitable basis across all economic sectors. This has been the policy of successive governments for many years and is the express purpose of the National Revaluation Programme now being rolled out by the Valuation Office. The National Revaluation Programme currently underway is the first general revaluation of all commercial property in the State since the middle of the 19th century. It is a very significant undertaking involving the valuation of some 150,000 rateable commercial properties. Completing the first revaluation and getting properties in every local authority area onto the 5 - 10 year cycle of revaluations provided for in the legislation represents a sea-change for the rateable valuation system. The present position is that all rateable properties in the Dublin, Waterford and Limerick local authority areas are now revalued. I am advised that in total, approximately 48,600 individual properties have been revalued equating to 57% of the national rateable valuation base in monetary value terms or 32% in numerical terms. In addition, 13 public utilities representing some of the largest ratepayers in the State have been revalued on a global basis.

Significant progress is being made and the National Revaluation Programme has established a momentum which is now being built upon as the current phase of work known as "RE-VAL 2017" is well underway and scheduled to conclude in September 2017. It covers counties Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon, Westmeath, Kildare, Offaly, Sligo, Carlow and Kilkenny and South Dublin County Council area where a second revaluation is also underway. Proposed valuation certificates issued in January 2017 for counties Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath; in March 2017 for counties Kildare, Offaly and Sligo; and for Carlow and Kilkenny in May 2017. Additionally, proposed valuation certificates issued to all ratepayers in South Dublin county council area in April 2017. Thus, in total, approximately 28,400 proposed valuation certificates have issued. A certificate of final valuation will issue to each ratepayer in the aforementioned counties in early September 2017 and new Valuation Lists for each of the ten counties will be published on 15 September 2017. The valuations on those Valuation Lists will be used as the basis for the assessment of rates by the local authority with effect from 1 January 2018. As indicated above, if a ratepayer is still dissatisfied with the valuation on the final certificate which they will receive next September, they have the right to lodge a formal appeal with the Valuation Tribunal.

Specifically in relation to the impact of revaluation on SMEs, the general outcome of the revaluations conducted to date by the Valuation Office is that about 60% of all ratepayers have had their liability for rates reduced following a revaluation and about 40% have had an increase. I am advised by the Valuation Office that this pattern is expected to be replicated in the counties that are being revalued as part of REVAL 2017.

Garda Equipment

882. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and percentage of the Garda fleet aged over ten years as of 9 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28808/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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.

Material in relation to the strength of the Garda Fleet, as of 19 April 2017, the date for which it is readily available, is as outlined in the table below. I have requested the Commissioner for a breakdown of the percentage of vehicles greater than 10 years and will revert to the Deputy when same is to hand.

Age	Fleet Total	% of Total
	2,794	100%
< 1 Year	504	18%
1 - 2 Years	413	15%
2- 4 Years	799	29%
4 - 6 Years	235	8%
> 6 Years	843	30%

Garda Reserve

883. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the recent resignation of a person (details supplied) from the Garda Reserve force; if his attention has been further drawn to suggestions that inadequate training and insufficient resourcing of the local Garda division contributed to the person's decision to quit the role; his plans to revise the existing deployment of reserve members with the view to better utilise the force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28840/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have received representations in connection with the person referred to by the Deputy.

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.

The Garda Reserve was established in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to enhance the links between An Garda Síochána and local communities and consists of voluntary unpaid members, drawn from the community, to support the work of An Garda Síochána. The

Reserve perform policing duties as determined by the Garda Commissioner, while accompanied by full time Gardaí. Their role is to provide local patrols and participate in crime prevention initiatives targeted at specific local problem areas. Reserve members are also involved in policing major incidents and events, and in providing other operational support to full time Gardaí. In recent years the Garda Commissioner has conferred further powers on reserve members under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and the Road Traffic Act 1961 and has also decided that they should carry out more duties including the serving of summonses, and the issuing of Fixed Charge Penalty Notices where offences are detected.

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

This plan is progressing well. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves. I am pleased to say that the Garda Commissioner launched a new recruitment drive for Garda Reserves on 23 March last which received a strong response with close to 2,400 people applying to become Reserves and give something back to their communities on a voluntary basis.

It is regrettable that there has been a substantial reduction in the strength of the Reserve in recent years from a peak of 1,164 in 2013 to 649 currently. The fall-off arises from a range of factors, not least the lifting in 2014 of the moratorium on recruitment of trainee Gardaí which has affected Reserve numbers in two ways - firstly some 200 serving Reserves have successfully applied to become trainee Gardaí, and secondly, resources in both An Garda Síochána and in the Public Appointment Service have been focused on delivering an accelerated programme of recruitment of full time members of An Garda Síochána. I am sure that the Deputy will agree, notwithstanding the very valuable contribution of Reserve members throughout the country, that it was the right decision, with finite resources, to prioritise the running of recruitment campaigns to replenish the full-time ranks of An Garda Síochána over the last three years. With the plan to reach 15,000 Garda members well on track it was possible for the Commissioner and the Public Appointments Service to undertake a new recruitment campaign for Garda Reserves. That is now in train and will, allowing for the selection process and necessary training of successful candidates, facilitate a start to be made on strengthening of the Reserve across every Garda Division.

Reserve members have undergone training in many of the skills required to be an effective full-time member of An Garda Síochána and it is important that as we expand the Reserve we build on their contribution to the policing of communities right across the country and ensure that they are used to optimum effect. In this regard I am informed that An Garda Síochána is undertaking an audit of the experience and skills of Reserves which, when completed, will assist Garda management in considering the future role to be played by the Reserve including whether additional powers should be conferred on Reserve members.

Garda Data

884. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 46 of 1 June 2017, the details of the moneys recouped by policing services for policing at events in County Donegal in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28865/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, in accordance with Section 30 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, at the request of a person or commercial entity, the Garda Commissioner may provide and charge for police services for events on private property or in areas open to the public. The objective in charging for police services is to recover the cost of providing the service.

In addition, I understand that Section 231(4)(j) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 permits the collection of policing costs with regard to events that require local authority licenses under the terms of the Act.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that they seek the recovery of policing costs associated with commercial events that have been organised with the objective of making a financial gain and without specific community or charitable benefit.

However, An Garda Síochána does not seek to recover its costs for charitable events or for statutory national public events such as policing the St. Patrick's Day parade as these duties are funded by the public purse. Charitable events relate to events organised with the objective of providing a charitable service to the community.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the table below outlines the amount of money recouped by An Garda Síochána for the provision of security services and the policing of sporting and other events in County Donegal in 2016.

Year	Sporting Fixtures	Concerts/Festivals	Other Events	Total
2016	€11,200	€14,600	€189,532	€215,332

Garda Deployment

885. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of newly attested Garda assigned to the Wicklow Division in 2017 in view of the need for increased gardaí in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28910/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Units and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Wicklow Division, on 30 April 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 295. There are also 22 Garda Reserves and 24 civilians attached to the 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.

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 to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 13 of whom have been assigned to the Wicklow Division. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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.

Question No. 886 answered with Question No. 715.

Road Traffic Offences Data

887. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No.126 of 9 May 2017, the number of summons served to persons for non-payment of fixed charge notices for this offence; the number of persons convicted and charged for non-payment of fixed charge notices for this offence; the number of driver licence numbers recorded upon this conviction; the number struck out due to non serving of summons, by each Court, in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28978/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from both the Garda authorities and the Courts Service in relation to the matters referred to in the Deputy's questions and I will contact the Deputy directly upon receipt of these reports.

Question No. 888 answered with Question No. 794.

Judicial Appointments

889. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the process that was put in place for the recent appointment to the Court of Appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29000/17]

890. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he and his officials have satisfied themselves that section 18 of the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995 was followed in the most recent appointment to the Court of Appeal; the way in which it was

applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29001/17]

891. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of application processes which were gone through for the most recent vacancy on the Court of Appeal; if the vacancy was discussed in his Department between the then Minister for Justice and Equality; if there were concerns regarding the appointment process outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29002/17]

893. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has satisfied himself regarding the way the most recent vacancy in the Court of Appeal was filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29004/17]

895. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which appointments to the Court of Appeal have been filled since the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board was set up under the 1995 Act; if the most recent appointments differed from previous appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29006/17]

896. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether the most recent appointment to the Court of Appeal illustrates best practice; if it follows Government policy on State appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29007/17]

897. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or his Department were concerned when the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board informed them that they were not in a position to recommend a person for the vacancy to the Court of Appeal; if it was discussed; the actions which were taken to try to address these concerns within the process outlined under the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29008/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 889 to 891, inclusive, 893 and 895 to 897, inclusive, together.

In accordance with Articles 13.9 and 35.1 judicial appointments are made by the President acting on the advice of the Government. This is a Constitutional function that cannot be transferred or delegated.

The Judicial Appointments Advisory Board (JAAB) was established under the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995 to identify persons and inform the Government of the suitability of those persons for appointment to judicial office. The process through which the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board recommends applicants for consideration by Government is set out in Part IV of the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995, as amended. The JAAB deals with applications from candidates for judicial office. Eligible judges who wish to be considered for promotion to the Superior Courts are not dealt with by JAAB; in such instances under non-statutory informal arrangements existing judges may make their wish to be considered for higher judicial office known to the Attorney General. Under section 16 of the Act, where a judicial office stands vacant or before a vacancy in a judicial office arises, on a request to do so by the Minister, the Board submits to the Minister for Justice and Equality, the names of the persons recommended for appointment. The Minister then brings the names to Government which decides on the person or persons to nominate to the President for appointment. The 1995 Act specifies that the Government shall first consider any nominations from JAAB in deciding on the person or persons to nominate to the President for appointment to judicial office.

On 5 January 2017, the JAAB sought, by public advertisement, applications from practising barristers and solicitors eligible for appointment to the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, High

Court, Circuit Court and District Court.

A vacancy for an Ordinary Judge of the Court of Appeal arose following the retirement of the Hon. Mr. Justice Garrett Sheehan on 23 March 2017. The Tánaiste and then Minister for Justice and Equality wrote to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board on 12 April 2017 to seek a list of suitable candidates from the JAAB in respect of various judicial vacancies including the vacancy in the Court of Appeal.

JAAB reported on 16 May 2017, in accordance with the Courts and Courts Officers Acts 1995-2002, that it was not in a position to recommend a person for appointment to the vacancy in the Court of Appeal. From time to time in the past, JAAB has reported that it is not in a position to recommend any candidates as suitable for appointment as a judge. As the Deputy will know the Government, in nominating a person to the President for appointment to judicial office, is not limited constitutionally to the consideration of the outcome of a JAAB process but is obliged under the 1995 Act to first consider the names of any persons recommended by JAAB, something which did not arise in this instance since there were no such recommendations.

Section 18 of the Court and Court Officers Act 1995 provides that the Board may recommend the Attorney General for appointment to judicial office and that where the Attorney General wishes to be considered for appointment he/she will withdraw from any deliberations of the Board concerning his or her suitability for judicial office. However, I as Minister for Justice, am unable to comment further as Section 20 of the Court and Court Officers Act 1995 provides that all proceedings of the JAAB and all communications to the Board shall be confidential. The obligation on the Attorney General to exclude him/herself from deliberations is in relation to JAAB and applies only in the context of the 1995 Act and only where the Attorney General has asked JAAB to consider her/him for judicial office. There is nothing (nor constitutionally could there be anything) in this provision which could prevent the Government from nominating the Attorney General to a judicial appointment as long as the Attorney General is eligible and qualified.

At its meeting of 13 June 2017, Government decided to nominate the then Attorney General, Ms. Máire Whelan S.C., for appointment as an ordinary judge of the Court of Appeal, pursuant to its prerogative under Article 13.9 of the Constitution to advise the President on appointments to judicial office. Yesterday, Ms Justice Máire Whelan was appointed by the President as a judge of the Court of Appeal.

It would not be appropriate for me, as Minister for Justice and Equality, to comment any further on specific nominations to judicial office which are decisions made by Government and are subject to Cabinet confidentiality under Article 28.4.3° of the Constitution. The Government has sole discretion under the Constitution to nominate persons of its own choosing, providing they are qualified and eligible for appointment as a Judge.

Neither I nor my Department are aware of any meetings/discussions of the nature referred to by the Deputy other than the Government meeting on 13 June 2017 and the processes of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board in relation to the vacancy which are subject to the statutory confidentiality requirement as set out above.

I can inform the Deputy that, when the Court of Appeal came into existence in 2014, a President and 9 ordinary judges were appointed, all of whom were serving judges: 9 were judges in the High Court and one was a judge in the Circuit Court. Since the establishment of the Court, one vacancy was filled in September 2016 with the elevation of a serving judge from the High Court. To date no judge has been appointed to the Court of Appeal through an application made to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board.

I am satisfied that all necessary procedures regarding judicial appointment have been followed in this instance.

The Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, which was published on 1 June 2017 fulfils the Programme for Government commitment to introduce legislation to replace the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board with a new Judicial Appointments Commission. The aim of the reform of the judicial appointments process is to ensure that the system is transparent, fair and credible.

The Bill makes provision for a completely new system for selecting persons who wish to apply for appointment to judicial office, comprising a Commission with a lay chair and a lay majority. The proposed new system will, for the first time, include applications by serving judges for appointment to positions in higher judicial courts.

Judicial Appointments

892. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are minutes of meetings at which the vacancy in the Court of Appeal were discussed in the past three months; if he will release these minutes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29003/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In accordance with Articles 13.9 and 35.1 of the Constitution, judicial appointments are made by the President acting on the advice of the Government. The current process for the appointment of judges in Ireland is set out in Part IV of the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995, as amended.

Section 20 of the Court and Court Officers Act 1995 provides that all proceedings of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board and all communications to the Board shall be confidential.

Furthermore, the consideration of the filling of judicial vacancies are decisions made by Government and are subject to Cabinet confidentiality under Article 28.4.3° of the Constitution and therefore it is not possible to release the minutes of Cabinet meetings.

Neither I nor my Department are aware of any meetings of the nature referred to by the Deputy other than the Government meeting on 13 June 2017 and the processes of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board in relation to the vacancy which are subject to the statutory confidentiality requirement as set out above.

Question No. 893 answered with Question No. 889.

Judicial Appointments

894. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he, his predecessor or his Department’s officials sought legal advice regarding filling the most recent Court of Appeal vacancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29005/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that, for the most part, the legal services sought by my Department are coordinated by the Office of the Attorney General and the Chief State Solicitor’s Office. These services are typically sought in the context of the preparation of legislation, legal advice in respect of policy issues and in the management of litigation including judicial reviews.

The subject matter of the advice, and the advice itself, is covered by legal professional privilege.

Questions Nos. 895 to 897, inclusive, answered with Question No. 889.

Question No. 898 answered with Question No. 734.

Judicial Appointments

899. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) recused themselves from the selection process for the vacancy on the Court of Appeal caused by the retirement of a person. [29013/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In accordance with Articles 13.9 and 35.1 of the Constitution, judicial appointments are made by the President acting on the advice of the Government. Section 20 of the Court and Court Officers Act 1995 provides that all proceedings of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board and all communications to the Board shall be confidential.

It would not be appropriate for me, as Minister for Justice and Equality, to comment any further on specific nominations to judicial office which are decisions made by Government and are subject to Cabinet confidentiality under Article 28.4.3° of the Constitution.

Judicial Appointments

900. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications received by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board for the vacancy on the Court of Appeal. [29014/17]

901. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications from serving High Court judges received by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board for the vacancy on the Court of Appeal. [29015/17]

902. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications from serving District Court judges received by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board for the vacancy on the Court of Appeal. [29016/17]

903. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications from serving Circuit Court judges received by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board for the vacancy on the Court of Appeal. [29017/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 900 to 903, inclusive, together.

Under the provisions of section 20 of the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995 all proceedings of the Board and all communications to the Board shall be confidential and shall not be disclosed except for the purposes of this Act.

However, the Deputy may be aware that, in accordance with section 11 of the Court and Court Officers Act 2002, the JAAB is required to make an annual report of its activities, copies of which will be available on the Board’s website www.jaab.ie and will also be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas in due course.

For the information of the Deputy I would point out that it is not in general necessary for eligible serving judges to apply to the JAAB for elevation to higher judicial positions since section 17 of the Courts and Court Officers Act 1995 provides that where the Government proposes to advise the President to appoint to judicial office a person who is for the time being a judge of the High Court, Circuit Court or District Court, the provisions of Section 16 of the Act (i.e. the JAAB application process set out in that section) shall not apply.

The Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, which was published on 1 June 2017, makes provision for a completely new system for selecting persons who wish to apply for appointment to judicial office, comprising a Commission with a lay chair and a lay majority. The proposed new system will, for the first time, include applications by serving judges for appointment to positions in higher judicial courts.

Departmental Staff Data

904. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29042/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not keep external transfer lists in relation to officers wishing to seek a transfer to other Departments or agencies outside of Dublin. Officers interested in applying for such transfers are advised to approach the relevant Human Resources Division directly to express their interest.

In relation to staff members from my Department who have requested a move to one of our regional offices outside of Dublin from 2014 to date, the information requested by the Deputy can be found in the following table. It should be noted that if an officer wishes to take up a transfer such moves are undertaken at the officer's own expense.

Finally, the Deputy may be aware that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently rolling out a Civil Service Wide Mobility Scheme allowing staff to apply centrally for a transfer to another Department or agency. The scheme is expected to be operational in 2018, and is one of a number of arrangements that fulfil the requirements of Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan which calls for mobility opportunities for staff across geographic, organisational and sectoral boundaries.

Year applied for	Number
2015	3
2016	5
2017	5

Garda Stations

905. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to reopen the garda station in Kill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29102/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of

the resources available to her, including in relation to Garda stations.

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

Valuation Office

906. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason petrol stations are being revalued at an increase of 400%; the further reason the forecourts of petrol stations are being valued at four times higher than the forecourts of other stores; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28539/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that the Commissioner of Valuation is independent in carrying out his functions under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 and I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in this regard.

Having a modern valuation base is very important for the levying of commercial rates on a fair and equitable basis across all economic sectors including commercial units selling petrol. This has been the policy of successive Governments for many years and is the express purpose of the National Revaluation Programme now being rolled out by the Valuation Office. The revaluation provisions in the Valuation Acts 2001-2015 provide for the revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area so as to reflect changes in value due to economic factors, differential movements in property values or other external factors such as infrastructural changes in the vicinity of a property and changes in the local business environment. The National Revaluation Programme is the first revaluation of all rating authority areas in over 150 years and is being conducted across the country on a phased basis. This is a welcome development which is long overdue and on which considerable progress has been made. Revaluation is an important instrument in redressing historical anomalies in relation to commercial rates for both urban and rural properties and between particular classes of property within a local authority area.

A valuation for commercial rates purposes is an estimate of the *Net Annual Value* (NAV) of a property, at a specified valuation date, on the assumption that the occupier is responsible for the payment of commercial rates and for insuring and maintaining the property. The term “net annual value” has a legal definition and is set out in section 48 of the Valuation Act 2001 as the rent for which, one year with another, the property might, in its actual state, be reasonably expected to let from year to year, on the assumption that the probable average annual cost of repairs, insurance and other expenses (if any) that would be necessary to maintain the property in that state, and all rates and other taxes payable in respect of the property, are borne by the tenant.

Estimating the NAV of a rateable property is an evidence-based exercise. In this regard, I am informed that the Valuation Office analyses relevant market rental transactions for all rateable properties including filling stations in accordance with the legislation, best practice internationally, well-established valuation principles and case law arising from the independent Valuation Tribunal and the higher Courts and the conclusion drawn from that analysis is applied to similarly circumstanced property using the “comparative” method of valuation which, as the name implies, employs direct comparison with other similar properties.

While some Proposed Valuation Certificates issued as part of REVAL 2017 may contain significant increases in the valuations of various property types, including petrol stations and their forecourts, possible reasons for such increases where they occur would be that the valua-

tion of some of these properties had not been revised to take account of improvements, extensions or extensive refurbishment that was not reflected in the valuation immediately before the revaluation that is now in train. I am advised by the Commissioner of Valuation that the general outcome of the revaluations conducted to date by the Valuation Office has been that about 60% of ratepayers have had their liability for rates reduced following a revaluation and about 40% had an increase, a pattern which is most welcome and is expected to be replicated elsewhere as the programme advances.

The current phase of the national revaluation programme (known as “REVAL 2017”) covers the revaluation of all rateable properties in counties Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly, Kildare, Sligo, Carlow and Kilkenny where a revaluation is being undertaken for the first time since the nineteenth century. It also includes the second revaluation of the South Dublin County Council area. Revaluation in these counties is expected to be completed in September 2017 and become effective for rating purposes from 2018 onwards. The Commissioner’s intention is then to extend the revaluation programme to other counties.

Following revaluation there is a much closer and uniform relationship between contemporary rental values of all rateable properties in a local authority area and their respective commercial rates liabilities. In essence, the exercise aims to ensure that each ratepayer bears a fair share of the rates burden relative to the modern rental value of the property that they occupy. This applies to service stations as it does to hotels, retail outlets and all other categories of property. A key element of revaluation is to remove anomalies in the system where they exist and establish fair and equitable relativities between the various property classifications. Having regard to the revaluations conducted to date it would be expected that the majority of small businesses in rural Ireland will see their rates liability decrease following a revaluation.

There is an extensive process to cater for ratepayers who are dissatisfied with the proposed valuations they receive from the Valuation Office. In this regard, a dissatisfied person can make representations to the Valuation Office within 40 days of the date of issue to them of the certificate of the proposed valuation. The Valuation Office will consider the representations and may or may not change the proposed valuation depending on the circumstances of each individual property. If any ratepayer is still dissatisfied with the final valuation to be placed on their property following consideration of the representations, they have a right to lodge a formal appeal with the Valuation Tribunal, which is an independent statutory body established for the purpose of hearing appeals against decisions of the Commissioner of Valuation.

Passport Applications Fees

907. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the exemptions that apply for passport fees in the case of a person born in the UK (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28642/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I understand the Deputy’s question relates to the fees payable in relation to an application for naturalisation, following the grant of which the person naturalised could then apply for an Irish passport to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for Irish citizenship through naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

The fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 569 of 2011). The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

There is no provision in the Regulations for the discretionary waiver or reduction of fees, or for differing fees to apply to different nationalities. All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 are kept under ongoing review by my Department; however, there are no plans to amend the fees.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met. The appropriate application form for a certificate of naturalisation by a person of full age, including a person in circumstances outlined by the Deputy, is Form 8.

Departmental Funding

908. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will increase the core funding available to an organisation (details supplied) under the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks, in view of the scope and range of services currently provided by the organisation on a very modest budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28884/17]

911. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to increase the core funding available to a group (details supplied) under the National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks in view of the scope and range of services provided by the group on a very modest budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29174/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 908 and 911 together.

The National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks, which comprises 17 groups, is mainly funded by my Department. The allocation for this year is €1.385 million. Funding for 2018 will be considered as part of the overall budgetary process within the fiscal parameters set by Government.

Question No. 909 answered with Question No. 734.

EU Agreements

910. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to implement Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and thereby repeal Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) which is due by 25 May 2018; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [29121/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that Regulation (EU) 2016/679 will apply with effect from 25 May 2018. While generally applicable without a need for transposing national law, the Regulation contains a number of Articles which allow Member States a margin of flexibility in implementing certain provisions in their national laws. Part 3 of the Data Protection Bill 2017, which is currently being examined by the Joint Justice and Equality Committee at pre-legislative scrutiny stage, contains provisions which are intended to give effect to the Articles concerned.

Question No. 911 answered with Question No. 908.

Question No. 912 answered with Question No. 709.

Shooting Rights

913. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of proposed changes to legislation that would ban the practice of night-time shooting and hunting. [27875/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that there is no proposal to ban night time shooting. At a meeting of the Firearms Consultative Panel (chaired by my Department) held on April 5th 2016, shooting groups stated that illegal shooting at night is a serious safety issue which needed to be addressed. As a result a working group on night time shooting chaired by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) with membership from An Garda Síochána and other shooting interest groups held a number of meetings resulting in a draft report prepared by the NPWS. The proposals in the draft report do not contain a legal ban on night time shooting but rather are intended to act as best practice guidance for shooters. I understand, during discussions by the working group, that many issues arose for consideration in what is a complex and challenging area.

That draft report was submitted to the Firearms Consultative Panel for consideration on April 20th 2017. While the draft report received considerable support, certain concerns were raised. As a result members of the Firearms Consultative Panel were invited to make submissions by June 1st which will be considered by the NPWS chair of the working group on night time shooting, in conjunction with members of the Working Group. A full meeting of the Firearms Consultative Panel, chaired by my Department, will subsequently consider the matter.

Emergency Planning

914. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the claim that gardaí will not be able to respond to a London bridge type incident in the way that British police did and that An Garda Síochána is not trained to do so. [28203/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will understand that it is generally not the practice nor would it be prudent to disclose the detail of the security arrangements in place to respond the threat of a terrorist incident. To so do would plainly provide an advantage to those with ill intent. However, I want to assure the Deputy and the House that such a claim as that to which the Deputy refers is as unfortunate as it is ill-founded.

An Garda Síochána has the capacity to deploy considerable operational capabilities in response to critical incidents. There is, in particular, a highly-trained and well-equipped special

intervention capability in the Emergency Response Unit that it is supported by a number of regional Armed Support Units and the range of other resources across the Garda organisation. Last year a dedicated Armed Response Unit was established for the Dublin region and it is currently being expanded significantly. The Deputy will wish to know that these operational capabilities are exercised on a routine and targeted basis and, in the context of actions to counter serious organised crime and paramilitary activity, they are the subject also of frequent deployment.

The considerable skills and resources of the Defence Forces are also available in support to the civil power when and where needed, and the Garda and Defence Forces work closely together on an ongoing basis in order to ensure preparedness for emergency responses.

Departmental Correspondence

915. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or his officials have received a complaint from a person (details supplied) who claims that their files and documents cannot be located in the DPP's office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28948/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I understand that correspondence was received from the person referred to by the Deputy. A response issued which explained that the Minister for Justice and Equality has no role in relation to the investigation of crime and that the Director of Public Prosecutions is independent in operation and function. He was advised that it was open to him to write to the Director of Public Prosecutions. He was further advised of the role of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission in dealing with complaints concerning members of An Garda Síochána.

I understand that further correspondence from the person referred to has been forwarded to me by the Department of the Taoiseach. This correspondence will be considered and responded to in due course.

Departmental Staff Data

916. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form. [29255/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

	De- part- ment1	GSOC	Garda Civil- ian2	An Garda Síochána	Irish Prison Ser- vice	Courts Ser- vice	Pol- ic- ing Au- thor- ity	Valu- ation Office	Ord- nance Sur- vey Ire- land	Legal Aid Board3	Prop- erty Regis- tration Au- thor- ity	Na- tional Dis- ability Au- thor- ity	IHREC	To- tal
Carlow	3		9			7								19
Cavan	6		16			13				5				40
Clare			30			15			8	7				60
Cork	44	5	104			79			20	41				293
Donegal	9		30			20				11				70
Dublin	1602	69	621			585	21	121	149	171	287	36	42	3704

	De- part- ment ¹	GSOC	Garda Civil- ian ²	An Garda Síochána	Irish Prison Ser- vice	Courts Ser- vice	Pol- ic- ing Au- thor- ity	Valu- ation Office	Ord- nance Sur- vey Ire- land	Legal Aid Board ³	Prop- erty Regis- tration Au- thor- ity	Nat- ional Dis- ability Au- thor- ity	IHREC	To- tal
Galway	12		44			31			8	32				127
Kerry	111		30			17				61				219
Kildare			29			22				8				59
Kilkenny	9		19			14			12	11				65
Laois	49		14			11				12				86
Leitrim			6			5								11
Limerick	19		50			28				15				112
Longford	127	5	9			13			12	7				173
Louth	13		25			18				8				64
Mayo	5		221			23				11				260
Meath	32		75			16				7				130
Monaghan			19			12				9				40
Offaly	1		10			11				5				27
Roscom- mon	4		17			7					70			98
Sligo	4		20			9			14	10				57
Tipperary	123		288			21				9				441
Waterford	17		29			17				12	179			254
West- meath	9		22			13				11				55
Wexford	3		30			17				10				60
Wicklow	1		24			20				9				54
Total	2203	79	1791			1044	21	121	223	482	536	36	42	6578

Notes:

1. The Department as referenced in the first column of the table, includes all staff of the Department and the Agencies/Offices serviced by the Human Resources Division of my Department. The Department currently has 26 staff located abroad and 16 staff on secondment.

2. The figures included under Garda Civilian in the third Column do not include Garda sworn members. Also, it also does not include 302 non-established (State Industrial) staff e.g. general operatives etc. who are part of the Garda Civilian cohort but for whom a breakdown by county was not available.

3. The figure for the Legal Aid Board includes the Family Mediation Service.

Figures for sworn members of An Garda Síochána and prison staff in the Irish Prison Service are being compiled currently. I have asked An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service to provide the information directly to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Invasive Plant Species

917. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the measures which are being taken on managing and resolving the issue of knotweed in County Cork. [28679/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am aware of public concern about the impact of Japanese Knotweed. In this re-

gard, I wish to advise that my Department is responsible for the implementation of the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), both of which prohibit the spreading of invasive species. In law, control of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed is a matter for landowners. In this regard, my Department carries out considerable work on controlling invasive species in National Parks and Nature Reserves..

My Department does not collect data from local authorities on the incidence of Japanese Knotweed in their particular counties or administrative areas, or indeed their actions to deal with this species. This is a matter for the Local Authorities themselves. However, information on the distribution of invasive species in Ireland, including Japanese Knotweed, is available on the invasive species section of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) website at <http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie>.

There is considerable work being carried out at present by a range of agencies in this area, including many Local Authorities.

My Department has also worked closely over the years with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to fund and manage the *Invasive Species Ireland Project*. Information on general management approaches to invasive plant species is available from the Invasive Species Ireland website: <http://invasivespeciesireland.com/toolkit/invasive-plant-management/>.

Arts Funding

918. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if local authority spending on arts is counted as discretionary or not. [28257/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I understand from my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, that the elected members of each local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, which includes adopting the annual budget and the allocations thereunder, and my Department has no role in this regard. It should be noted, however, that local authorities also receive specific allocations from Government Departments for specific purposes to which the funding must be applied. For example, the funding that my Department provides local authorities for the *Creative Ireland Programme* must be applied for those purposes as set out in the conditions attaching to that funding.

National Indemnity Scheme for Landowners

919. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on introducing a national indemnity scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28454/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Occupiers Liability Act 1995 provides significant protection in circumstances referred to by the Deputy. In addition, an insurance policy held by the National Trails Office provides indemnity where inspection and approval has been carried out by that Office.

Nonetheless, my Department is working closely with the State Claims Agency in relation to the development and implementation of a National Indemnity Scheme for situations referred to by the Deputy. Discussions are at an advanced stage and I anticipate that a scheme will be

agreed in a number of pilot areas before the end of 2017.

Departmental Staff Data

920. Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff employed in her Department and in each State agency under the aegis of her Department, by county, in tabular form. [29248/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that the following tables show the number of staff employed in my Department and in each State agency under the aeg is of my Department by county.

	Dept.	Boord o Ulster- Scotch*	Craw- ford Art Gallery	Foras na Gaeilge*	Heri- tage Coun- cil	Irish Film Board	Chester Beatty Library	Na- tional Library of Ire- land	Na- tional Gallery of Ire- land	Na- tional Con- cert Hall	Arts Coun- cil	Irish Muse- um of Mod- ern Art	Na- tional Muse- um of Ireland	Údarás na Gael- tacht	Wa- ter- ways Ire- land*	WDC
Dublin	280			39		14	30	90	129	72	46	110	122		17	
Carlow															8	
Cavan															4	
Clare	14														17	
Cork	14		19													
Donegal	56	2		8												
Galway	93					4								83	26	
Kerry	100															
Kildare	9														20	
Kilkenny	2				13										30	
Leitrim	3															
Limerick	1															
Mayo	59												22			
Meath	2			3												
Monaghan	1															
Offaly	4														50	
Roscom- mon	2														22	15
Sligo	7															
Tipperary	8															
Waterford	2															
Westmeath	5														34	

Questions - Written Answers

	Dept.	Boord o Ulster-Scotch*	Crawford Art Gallery	Foras na Gaeilge*	Heritage Council	Irish Film Board	Chester Beatty Library	National Library of Ireland	National Gallery of Ireland	National Concert Hall	Arts Council	Irish Museum of Modern Art	National Museum of Ireland	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Waterways Ireland*	WDC
Wexford	39															
Wicklow	22															

*Boord o Ulster-Scotch, Foras na Gaeilge and Waterways Ireland are North/South bodies and have staff in Northern Ireland also.

Arts Promotion

921. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of plans for works to commence at a theatre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26752/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I recently announced details of grants of over €9 million in capital funding for arts and culture centres across the country. This capital scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. This kind of investment is at the centre of what I am trying to achieve through Creative Ireland and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme a total of 62 projects are being funded under Streams 1 and 2 including seven flagship projects. The theatre to which the Deputy refers is one of those flagship projects and was allocated up to €1 million towards the cost of an enhancement and accessibility project. A Service Level Agreement between the project promoter and my Department has been drawn up and signed by both parties. The project promoter has until 30 March 2020 to draw down this funding and I understand that plans are progressing well with this project.

Departmental Funding

922. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to a submission for additional funding in respect of an event centre (details supplied); if she has satisfied herself that proper accountability, management, oversight, evaluation and spending decisions are robust and in keeping with all public procurement rules and regulations; and her views on the request for additional funding from the exchequer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26864/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Cork Events Centre is a project being developed and managed by Cork City Council. My Department allocated €12 million to the City Council towards the cost of the Centre. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements in relation to major capital projects. My Department recently received correspondence from Cork City Council stating that the developer has informed the Council that the overall project costs has risen to €65 million which is an increase of approximately €12m. My Department has not yet been supplied with full details of the in-

creased costs at this stage. Cork City Council has been asked to provide additional information on the cost increases and once furnished my Department will consider the matter further.

Brexit Issues

923. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the threats identified by her Department with regard to the responsibilities of her Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26897/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on *Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union*. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the Institute of International and European Affairs on 15 February last.

I hosted a productive public forum on Brexit in Monaghan last November which was attended by a range of interests from the Border region. I also hosted a Sectoral Dialogue on Brexit in Cavan on 6th February which was attended by over 100 stakeholders from across the arts, culture, film, heritage, Irish language, regional and rural affairs sectors. This Sectoral Dialogue meeting focused on the impacts of Brexit on the sectors served by my Department, with particular attention being given to the impacts on Rural and Border communities. This event was part of the ongoing engagement with civil society initiated through the series of All-Island Civic Dialogues hosted by the Taoiseach.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. Contingency work examining all scenarios is continuing and it not possible to pre-empt the outcome at this stage.

As far as my own Department is concerned, I am acutely aware of the challenges arising from Brexit for Rural Ireland and for the border area in particular. The actions set out in the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development launched in January, will assist in supporting rural communities, including those in border areas, to meet the challenges posed by Brexit and to position themselves to avail of the opportunities which also may arise. The Action Plan contains over 270 actions to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies to support the economic and social development of rural Ireland.

Concluding a mutually acceptable Brexit deal will also be important from the perspective of the Arts and Culture sector in Ireland. While arrangements between cultural institutions are, in many instances, subject to UN or Council of Europe agreements, any implications for availability of European funding and restrictions to "the four freedoms" could limit the free movement of artists, arts organisations. There is also the potential for disruption in areas where we compete for business with the UK, such as the film industry and cultural or heritage tourism where the common standards that Ireland and the UK currently adhere to, based mainly on EU Directives, currently provide a level playing field.

I am very conscious of the extent to which EU membership has created a favourable context for the operation of North-South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement, two of which, Waterways Ireland and the Language Body come under the remit of my Department. Waterways Ireland is the largest of the Implementation Bodies – it employs over 300 people – and is headquartered in Enniskillen. Foras na Gaeilge, a constituent agency of the Language Body, also maintains offices on both sides of the border. Curtailment of free movement, particularly free movement of people and goods, could, therefore, present challenges for the effective operation of the two Bodies. The protection of the arrangements put in place under the Good Friday Agreement of an acceptable outcome in these areas will therefore be a high priority for the Government in the EU's forthcoming negotiations with the UK on Brexit.

Departmental Schemes

924. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the schemes offered by her Department that allow for benefits to persons, organisations or companies in the form of a tax break or direct grant to support items of arts, heritage, cultural or regional importance; the amount of money which has been granted or allowed to these schemes in each of the past five years; and the persons, organisations or companies involved. [26917/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There are a number of such schemes available across the range of my Department's activities and these are set out on my Department's website, including, where appropriate, the recipients of these grants, etc. My Department would be happy to provide further details on any specific scheme in which the Deputy may be interested.

National Monuments

925. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if compliance relating to works being carried out on 17a and 18 Moore Street with planning and building control regulations has been obtained; and if the works being carried out are authorised. [26939/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The works concerned are being carried to secure and safeguard the national monument as authorised by the High Court.

Public Sector Pensions

926. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if she will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of her Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26966/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that the information requested by the Deputy is as set out in the following tables. The National Museum of Ireland is currently collating its figures and will respond directly to the Deputy.

Pension Related Deductions (also called pension levy)

Body	2010 €000	2011 €000	2012 €000	2013 €000	2014 €000	2015 €000	2016 €000	2017 to end APRIL €000
Arts Council	134	133	136	145	125	127	104	29
Irish Film Board	59	55	54	61	57	59	45	13
Chester Beatty Library	72	70	71	75	77	74	55	18
Irish Museum of Modern Art	167	162	147	148	136	121	100	30
National Concert Hall	100	101	97	94	93	90	88	29
National Library of Ireland	243	232	222	221	231	196	138	41
Crawford Gallery	20	18	14	14	14	19	15	4
Heritage Council	63	63	64	61	56	56	46	13
Boord o Ulster- Scotch (An Foras Teanga)	3	3	2	2	6	3	3	1
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	122	164	165	160	140	146	117	36
Údarás na Gael- tachta	467	437	395	371	342	315	277	93
Waterways Ireland	642	609	591	577	510	452	342	91
Western Develop- ment Commission	53	47	45	44	37	36	36	10
National Gallery of Ireland	293	281	276	255	227	228	159	44

Staff Pension Contributions

Body	2010 €000	2011 €000	2012 €000	2013 €000	2014 €000	2015 €000	2016 €000	2017 to end APRIL €000
Arts Council	115	98	91	96	91	93	96	29
Irish Film Board	47	40	40	46	46	47	44	14
Chester Beatty Library	7	7	6	7	11	12	15	7
Irish Museum of Modern Art	122	107	114	103	107	106	113	40
National Concert Hall	12	12	12	12	15	18	22	8
National Library of Ireland	108	108	117	118	112	115	114	39
Crawford Gallery	14	13	10	10	13	17	19	6
Heritage Council	71	67	68	65	62	62	61	20
Boord o Ulster- Scotch (An Foras Teanga)	1	2	1	1	1	3	4	1
Foras na Gaeilge (An Foras Teanga)	40	42	43	40	34	107	125	43

Body	2010 €000	2011 €000	2012 €000	2013 €000	2014 €000	2015 €000	2016 €000	2017 to end APRIL €000
Údarás na Gaeltachta	403	354	309	272	260	254	274	94
Waterways Ireland	213	188	196	152	234	467	500	155
Western Development Commission	43	39	38	37	35	34	40	13
National Gallery of Ireland	112	110	106	105	102	113	128	47

Rural Development Programme

927. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the financial allocations under the 2014 to 2020 rural development programme per measure 19 support for Leader local development, in tabular form; the respective budget allocations for each year in this rural development plan; the annual amount spent to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27050/17]

928. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the annual expenditure between EAFRD and national exchequer funding to measure 19 support for Leader for local development under the rural development programme 2014 to 2020 in each of the years 2014 to 2016, in tabular form; the budget allocations from both these funding sources in each of the years 2017 to 2020 period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27051/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 927 and 928 together.

The LEADER programme forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 which is co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

The total amount of funding provided for LEADER 2014-2020 is €250 million over the lifetime of the programme. The EAFRD will contribute an average of 63% of the total cost of the programme (approximately €157 million), with the remaining 37% (approximately €93 million) being provided by the Exchequer. The allocation is provided for the duration of the programme rather than on an annual basis.

Funding for the programme is provided, in the first instance, from Exchequer resources in my Department's Vote, and the sum required each year is agreed as part of the annual Estimates process. A sum of €40 million has been provided for the programme in my Department's 2017 Estimate.

The EAFRD contribution to the programme is drawn down in arrears on the basis of expenditure actually incurred, and EAFRD receipts are treated as Appropriations-in-Aid in my Department's Vote.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the expenditure under the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme in each of the years 2014 to 2017. Expenditure commenced in 2015 and relates to preparatory support payments for the preparation of Local Development Strategies in each area, and to the administration and animation costs incurred by the LAGs in the delivery of the Programme.

Table 1 - Breakdown of LEADER 2014-2020 Expenditure between EAFRD and national Exchequer, 2014-2017

Year	Total Expenditure	of which EAFRD-recoupable (63%)	Net Exchequer (37%)
2014	€0.00	€0.00	€0.00
2015	€1,251,185.25	€788,246.71	€462,938.54
2016	€1,260,920.54	€794,379.94	€466,540.60
2017	€3,583,735.34	€2,257,753.26	€1,325,982.08
Total	€6,095,841.13	€3,840,379.91	€2,255,461.22

National Monuments

929. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she will transfer a street location (details supplied) to OPW control; when she will put a preservation order on a location; and if a location will be taken into State ownership and be provided as locations for some State organisations in order to save money on ongoing rent. [27126/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No 407 on 23 May 2017. I believe that the process set out in that reply represents the best approach to achieving an optimal outcome for the area concerned. The Committee is now in place and has had its inaugural meeting.

Disability Act Employment Targets

930. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in her Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of her Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27131/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that my Department complies with the “*Code of practice for the employment of people with disability in the Civil Service*”. The Department is also compliant with the obligations set out in the Disability Act 2005; it has reached the statutory minimum target of 3% and is currently at 3.15%. Ten of the 15 bodies under the aegis of my Department have also met the statutory minimum requirement. *Five bodies under the aegis of my Department have difficulties meeting the 3% quota as they have a very small number of employees, however all are equal opportunities employers whose recruitment policies do not discriminate regarding disability or otherwise. The National Disability Authority (NDA) accepts that the size of an organisation has an important bearing on whether it is realistic to achieve 3% of staff with disabilities - the requirement is particularly difficult to achieve for small bodies. The Department does not generally recruit staff directly, relying on the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to fill most vacancies that arise. However, a limited amount of recruitment takes place within the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department for certain specialised grades. My Department ensures that application forms contain a section allowing applicants to state if any reasonable accommodations are required in order for them to attend an interview. Furthermore, the Personnel Unit is at hand to provide application forms in a variety of accessible formats, including large print, and contact details are provided on all application forms.*

I am advised that no specific competition has been advertised by my Department or any of the bodies under the aegis of the Department, in respect of the 3% quota.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

931. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the budgetary allocation for the NPWS in 2016 and 2017; and the NPWS staff budget in 2016 and 2017. [27151/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available. Arrangements are being made for the information requested to be forwarded to the Deputy in line with the timelines set out in Standing Orders.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Staff

932. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to fill the vacant positions within the NPWS. [27152/17]

933. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of rangers in the employment of the NPWS prior to 2008; and the number of rangers in the employment of the NPWS in 2017. [27153/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 932 and 933 together.

I am advised that, at the establishment of my Department, in 2011, there were 85 Conservation Rangers employed across the country. There are currently 62 Conservation Rangers employed in the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department. As the Deputy is no doubt aware, over the course of the period, June 2011 to end December 2014, like many other Departments, my Department was required to reduce workforce numbers under the Employment Control Framework limits set by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I am pleased to note however that with the recovery of the economy there has been significant recruitment in the National Park and Wildlife Service of my Department in recent months. A recruitment campaign is currently underway to fill posts at Killarney House which will officially open to the public on 3rd July. Permanent General Operative posts have been filled in Connemara National Park and Glengarriff Nature Reserve, while three permanent posts have been filled in Killarney National Park. The Department has also filled 60 seasonal posts nationwide to cover the busy tourist season. Further permanent and temporary posts will be filled in the coming weeks. In addition, the Department is currently engaged with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) in recruiting Conservation Rangers. It is expected that eight conservation rangers will start in the coming weeks.

Staffing levels across the Department will continue to be kept under regular review in line with emerging business needs and having regard to Government policy on public sector pay and staffing as advised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Creative Ireland Programme

934. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the arts rich schools programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27182/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The *Creative Ireland Programme*, which the Taoiseach and I launched in December, places a special focus on “Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child”. Building on the Arts in Education Charter this will involve the development of an integrated plan – *Creative Children* - to enable every child in Ireland to access tuition in music, drama, art and coding by 2022. My Department officials continue to work with relevant Departments and other stakeholders to develop this plan with a launch timeframe of early Autumn 2017. The *Creative Children* plan will build on work to date in implementing the *Arts in Education Charter* to include the delivery of arts rich schools, making the arts a key part of school life across the country. My Department continues to work closely with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Youth and Children Affairs and the Arts Council to deliver the key objectives of the Charter within the wider context now of the *Creative Ireland Programme* to include non-mainstream education.

Arising from the significant increase of support of €5m which I secured for the Arts Council as part of Budget 2017, I am pleased that the Arts Council decided to increase funding in this area for 2017 from €3.1m in 2016 to €3.7m this year. I am also providing an additional €70,000 to the Arts Council to assist in the expansion of the Teacher Artist Partnership this year. This funding is being provided under the Creative Ireland Programme.

These initiatives demonstrate the overall commitment of Government to deliver for children as we work in finalising the Creative Children plan.

Capital Expenditure Programme

935. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the capital allocation for regional and rural affairs in 2017; the amount spent to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27278/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The capital allocation and the expenditure to date in 2017 for the Regional and Rural Affairs Division of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is outlined in the table below. The expenditure figures reflect provisional expenditure recorded on the Department’s financial management system as of Monday, 19th June 2017.

Some of the schemes under Subhead E5 of the Department’s Vote (e.g. CLÁR, Town and Village Renewal Scheme, Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure scheme) have yet to commence. However, funding approvals have recently been announced under CLÁR and approvals under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme are expected to be announced before the end of July. Applications under the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure scheme have also been received and are due to be assessed shortly.

Under the LEADER programme, more than 4,800 expressions of interest have been received from potential applicants, with an estimated value of over €200 million. The Local Action Groups are currently working through these expressions of interest with a view to assisting project promoters in developing and finalising project applications. In addition, my Department will shortly be introducing a range of administrative improvements to streamline the processes for the LEADER programme.

I therefore expect that expenditure under virtually all Subheads will increase significantly in the second half of the year.

Table 1: Capital Allocation and Expenditure, Regional and Rural Affairs 2017

Subhead	2017 Capital Allocation	Provisional Expenditure to 19th June 2017
E3: Dormant Accounts	€2,006,000	€57,029
E4: Western Development Commission	€1,000,000	€0
E 5: National Rural Development Schemes (Walks Scheme and CLÁR)	€11,383,000	€188,176
E 6: LEADER	€40,000,000	€4,487,453
E 8: Town and Village Regeneration	€12,000,000	€0
E 9: Rural Broadband, Regional Economic Development	€1,000,000	€0

Leader Programmes Funding

936. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the allocation for the implementation of the Leader programme in 2017; the amount spent on administration, animation and projects respectively to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27279/17]

937. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the value of the projects approved to date in 2017 under the 2014 to 2020 Leader programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27280/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 936 and 937 together.

Ireland's LEADER programme 2014-2020 has a total budget of €250 million over the lifetime of the programme. In line with Article 35 of EU Regulation 1303/2015, up to 25% of total expenditure incurred by LEADER Local Action Groups may be claimed in respect of administration and animation costs over the duration of the programme.

Expenditure to date in 2017 for the administration and animation costs incurred by the Local Action Groups (LAGs) who deliver the programme amounts to €3.584 million.

No project expenditure has yet been incurred under the LEADER 2014-2020 programme in 2017. However, the LAGs are currently concluding calls for proposals in each of their sub-regional areas, and I understand that more than 4,800 expressions of interest from potential applicants, with an estimated value of over €200 million, have been recorded on the LEADER ICT system. The LAGs are currently working through these expressions of interest with a view to assisting project promoters in developing and finalising project applications.

To date 55 projects have been fully approved for LEADER funding by the LAGs. The total value for these projects is €846,660. A further 44 projects, with a value of over €948,000, are at the final stages of the approval process.

On 17th May last, I hosted a forum with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, to explore the issues of concern to them and to identify potential solutions aimed at streamlining the current administrative and application procedures under the programme. On the basis of the suggestions made at the forum, my Department has identified more than 30 practical actions which can be taken to improve the administrative process under LEADER and which will make funding under the programme more accessible for potential project applicants. I have written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies outlining the changes that we intend to start introducing, with immediate effect in some instances.

I am confident that progress now being made by the LAGs, along the administrative changes being introduced, will result in a significant increase in project approvals and payments under LEADER over the coming months.

Capital Expenditure Programme

938. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the expenditure to date in 2017 of the capital carryover from 2016 broken down by estimate heading; the value of the work carried out to date in 2017 with the €28 million pre paid to local authorities under the town and village enhancement scheme and the CLÁR scheme in 2016, by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27281/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Provision is made in the Revised Estimates Volume for the carryover of unspent Capital funding from the previous year, subject to a Ministerial Order being made by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform before 31st March in the year of carryover. The amount of capital funding carried over into 2017 for my Department was €13.548 million. Since the making of the relevant Order by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the 6th March 2017, expenditure totalling just over €3.065 million has been incurred from the carryover up to 8th June 2017. A total of €402,000 has been spent under Subhead A.7: Cultural Infrastructure and Development; €663,000 has been spent under Subhead A.15: Decade of Centenaries 1912-1922, while the full allocation of €2 million has been spent under Subhead B.5: Natural Heritage (National Parks and Wildlife Service).

With regard to the second part of the Deputy's question, my officials are currently collecting updated expenditure figures from the Local Authorities in relation to their 2016 funding allocations under the Town and Village and CLÁR schemes. I will write to the Deputy with the details, in accordance with the procedures set out in Standing Orders.

Rural Recreation Promotion

939. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress which is being made in increasing the number of rural recreational officers nationwide from 20 to 40; the way in which a community organisation may avail of such a new position; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27293/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department currently administers the Walks Scheme, under which landholders receive modest payments to maintain sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. A total of 39 trails are currently covered by the scheme, and the number of landholders receiving payments under the scheme stands at approximately

1,900. There are currently 12 Rural Recreation Officers in place to support the delivery of the Walks Scheme. The Rural Recreation Officers are funded by my Department and are based in Local Development Companies.

The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development include a commitment to double the number of walks on the Walks Scheme. My officials are currently examining ways in which this commitment can best be progressed. The number of Rural Recreation Officers required as part of the expansion will be reviewed as part of the process.

I would point out that a doubling in the number of walks included in the scheme will not necessarily require a doubling in the number of Rural Recreation Officers, as issues such as the geographical distribution of additional walks and the number of landholders involved will be amongst the factors to be taken into account in determining the number of Officers required. The process of advertising for any additional Rural Recreation Officers will be determined when the additional walks for inclusion in the scheme are decided.

Departmental Contracts Data

940. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by her Department or agency or body under the aegis of her Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27446/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, neither my Department nor any of the agencies and bodies under its aegis, awarded any contracts to the company identified by the Deputy during the period in question.

Departmental Reports

941. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the estimated costs for the implementation of the recommendations in the Moore Street consultative group report. [27488/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Moore Street Advisory Group has just commenced its examination of the report's recommendations. Implementation will involve consultation, negotiation and agreement with, and actions by, a variety of public and private bodies. It would be entirely premature to attempt to cost the outcome at this early stage.

Post Office Network

942. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she has undertaken to secure the rural post office network; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27518/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for a Partnership Government made a number of commitments

in relation to the Post Office network which were assigned to my Department. The commitments in question have now been completed or are significantly advanced.

Following an extensive deliberation process, I presented the final report of the Post Office Hub Working Group to Government in March. This report examined the potential for Post Offices to act as hubs of economic and social activity, particularly in rural communities, and recommended that a project to test the concept of Shared Value Co-located Post Offices should be piloted, initially at four locations.

There have been a number of developments in relation to postal services generally since the Programme for a Partnership Government was agreed last May, including the commissioning by An Post of a root and branch review of the company.

Overall responsibility for the postal sector, including the governance of An Post, falls under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and, in light of developments in the sector, it has been agreed that all aspects of the postal services, including the Post Office network, should transfer to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, where necessary, to support the Post Office network in rural communities.

Intellectual Property Management

943. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has had engagement with stakeholders in the music industry in terms of the establishment of a music industry taskforce with wide representation and which would examine a range of issues including the impact of intellectual property and copyright legislation and enforcement in both the music and technology industries, supports for the business of music education and a dedicated office similar to the Irish Film Board for the music sector. [27519/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Intellectual property rights, including copyright law, are a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation who is reviewing copyright legislation at present and my Department is engaging with this review. In relation to the arts and culture more generally, on December 8th last, the Taoiseach and I launched the *Creative Ireland Programme/Clár Éire Ildánach* as the Government's Legacy Programme arising out of the *Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme* and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in *Culture 2025*. The *Creative Ireland Programme* is a high-level, high-ambition, all-of-Government initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation.

My Department is now working to implement the Creative Ireland Programme with partners across Government and other key stakeholders.

I consider that the most appropriate interventions should continue through existing structures and I have no plans to set up a new agency at this stage. In relation to the remit of my own Department primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts, including music, throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. In the 2017 Budget, I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council delivering an increase of €5m or 8%, in the Council's funding this year. It will enable the Council to enhance support to artists and arts organisations around the country, including musicians, in line with its strategy, *Making Great Art Work*, which prioritises support for the artist and public engagement.

My Department also provides supports for Irish artists and musicians to travel abroad and develop their careers through its Culture Ireland programme. I am pleased that I secured a significant increase in the baseline funding for Culture Ireland from €2.5m in 2016 to €3.5m in 2017.

Departmental Investigations

944. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress of the investigation by her Department of the establishment of a public banking system here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27520/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, which could be delivered through the post office network. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

My Department is working actively with the Department of Finance to progress the Programme for a Partnership Government commitments. A public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks, to 29 March. My Department received a total of 16 replies from a range of stakeholders and all submissions are now available on my Department's website at: <http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/consultation/consultation-on-local-community-banking/>.

Senior officials from my Department and the Department of Finance also met with representatives of the German Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation, Irish Rural Link and the Public Banking Forum of Ireland to discuss the viability of the Sparkassen model of local community banking in an Irish context. All views received in relation to this matter are being considered and I anticipate that work on the examination of community banking models will be completed shortly. A report will be submitted to Government at that stage.

Recreational Facilities

945. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her views on the more efficient use of canals as tourism resources; her plans to increase accessibility to the Royal Canal from the Liffey basin, which is currently experiencing accessibility problems due to limited lifting of the Scherzer bridge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [22133/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Waterways Ireland manages over 400km of canals, the Royal and Grand Canals and Barrow Navigation. These are important publicly owned recreational corridors which support a wide range of boating and water sports. The canal towpaths represent opportunities for both local communities and tourists to enjoy off-road cycling and walking whilst enjoying the built and natural heritage of these important resources. Waterways Ireland has informed me that it has been working in partnership with a wide range of Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, the National Roads Authority, the National Trails Office and local communities to develop and enhance the towpaths along the canals in its care.

60 km of the proposed Dublin to Galway Greenway runs along the Royal Canal towpath, where the local authorities and the National Transport Authority have been key to supporting completion of this development.

In Dublin a programme to upgrade the towpaths into premium walking and cycleways has been on-going for a number of years. The towpaths provide invaluable opportunities for off road commuting and recreation and are unique green spaces in the city.

In 2016, a number of cycle paths and towpath upgrades were carried out along the Royal Canal in Counties Longford, and Kildare. By the end of 2017, Waterways Ireland will have completed upgrades of 80% of the Royal Canal towpath.

It is Waterways Ireland's goal to upgrade the towpaths along the entire route of the Royal and Grand Canals making it possible to leave Dublin and travel the 140km along either canal to reach the Shannon and also to connect the towpaths to the many amenities and attractions along these routes. The aim is to create new opportunities for all the communities who live along the canals to use these amenities on a daily basis and to attract visitors to make an extended journey.

Waterways Ireland's through its Dublin Docklands Action Plan is seeking to develop Grand Canal Dock and Spencer Dock as the city's Blue space and a focal point in a Dublin Water Quarter. Projects include delivery of a 40km city canal Blueway using the Docks, and the Grand and Royal Canals as a cycle route.

The Sherza bridges are not connected to the canal navigation or access to the Royal Canal and do not impinge on the use of the canal. The Newcomen Bridge, which is a railway bridge, has to be lifted to provide navigation to the Royal Canal once through Spencer Dock. These bridge lifts are facilitated by CIE and Waterways Ireland. The number of bridge lifts is kept under review, balancing demand against the significant costs involved.

Western Development Commission Membership

946. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the vacancies on the Western Development Commission will be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27631/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An advertisement seeking expressions of interest for appointment to the Board of the Western Development Commission was placed on the State Boards website earlier this year. The closing date for receipt of expressions of interest was 26th April 2017. The expressions of interest received were recently assessed by a panel formed by the Public Appointments Service, and a shortlist of candidates has been forwarded to my Department for consideration.

The appointments to the Board Western Development Commission will be made very shortly.

Road Projects Status

947. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the discussions her Department has had with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport regarding the upgrading of the N4 west of Mullingar to facilitate regional development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27632/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While officials from my Department met with Sligo County Council and their consultants at pre-planning stage in November 2016 to discuss matters in relation to the proposed development, I am not aware of any meeting having been sought by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Regional Development Funding

948. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the projects her Department is seeking financial support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) 2014-2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27633/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): (Ms Heather Humphreys, T.D.) I am advised that my Department does not have any role in the operation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and nor does it operate any programmes or projects which are in receipt of financial support from the Fund.

Banking Sector

949. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the discussions her Department has had with a group (details supplied); the technical assistance the group is willing to offer the Government in the establishment of a pilot public bank for the midlands region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27634/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for Government includes a commitment to investigate a German model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

As a part of this investigation, my officials, along with officials from the Department of Finance, met with the group referred to by the Deputy on 2nd March 2017. The group gave a presentation outlining the German public banking model and offered their expertise and assistance if the Government wished to develop the model throughout the State.

The engagement with the group in question was just one element of the process of investigating the model of local public banking. A public consultation process on the matter was launched in early March and ran for four weeks, to 29th March. My Department received a total of 16 replies from a range of stakeholders and all submissions are now available on my Department's website at: <http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/consultation/consultation-on-local-community-banking/>.

My Department is currently working with the Department of Finance to finalise a report on the merits of establishing local public banks in Ireland. I anticipate that this work will be completed shortly and a report will be submitted to Government at that stage.

Post Office Network

950. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way in which her Department plans to oversee and monitor the implementation of actions to support the post office network arising out of the report of the post office

renewal board and the post office hub working group as outlined in point 20 of the action plan for rural development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27635/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for a Partnership Government made a number of commitments in relation to the Post Office network which were assigned to my Department. The commitments in question have now been completed or are significantly advanced.

Following an extensive deliberation process, I presented the final report of the Post Office Hub Working Group to Government in March. This report examined the potential for Post Offices to act as hubs of economic and social activity, particularly in rural communities, and recommended that a project to test the concept of Shared Value Co-located Post Offices should be piloted, initially at four locations.

There have been a number of developments in relation to postal services generally since the Programme for a Partnership Government was agreed last May, including the commissioning by An Post of a root and branch review of the company. By and large, this has overtaken the work of the Post Office Network Renewal Board, which reported its findings to An Post in December last year.

Overall responsibility for the postal sector, including the governance of An Post, falls under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and, in light of developments in the sector, it has been agreed that all aspects of the postal services, including the Post Office network, should transfer to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

It will be a matter for that Minister's Department to oversee the future direction of An Post and the Post Office Network. However, my Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, where necessary, to support the Post Office network in rural communities.

Dormant Accounts Fund

951. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if a charity (details supplied) is to be considered for funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27678/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Michael Ring): The Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post), and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings. The Dormant Accounts Fund is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency.

The Acts provide for the disbursement of funds for the purposes of programmes or projects to assist:

- the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
- the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged; or
- persons with a disability.

My Department's role in relation to the Dormant Accounts Fund is to prepare a Disbursement Scheme every three years, setting out the objectives to be achieved by making disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund and the strategies for achieving those objectives. My Department also co-ordinates the preparation of annual Action Plans in line with the three-year Disbursement Scheme. The Action Plans contain the details of specific programmes and projects to be funded across Government Departments with the support of the Dormant Accounts Fund. It is a matter for the relevant Government Departments to advertise the details of their programmes and invite applications for funding once the Action Plan is approved each year.

My Department is currently finalising a new Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 2017, following a detailed consultation process across Government Departments. It would appear that any funding available from the Dormant Accounts Fund for the organisation referred to by the Deputy might be appropriate to schemes operated by the Department of Health. Any further enquiries in relation to the matter would be best addressed to that Department.

Departmental Expenditure

952. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount her Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27703/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, neither my Department nor any of the agencies and bodies under its aegis, have made any payments to the company identified by the Deputy.

Creative Ireland Programme

953. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding Creative Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27729/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Taoiseach and I launched the Creative Ireland Programme 2017–2022 in December 2016 as the Government Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016 and as the main implementation vehicle for the priorities identified in the draft policy document Culture 2025/Éire Ildánach, which sets out an overarching vision and framework for culture over the coming years. The Creative Ireland Programme is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing. This focuses on boosting cultural provision and participation in communities and harnessing the goodwill and engagement generated by the 2016 commemorative programme.

The core proposition of this programme is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement. The programme is based on five pillars:

- Enabling the creative potential of every child
- Enabling creativity in every community
- Investing in our creative and cultural infrastructure
- Establishing Ireland as a centre of excellence in media production

- Unifying our global reputation

An enabling budget of €5m has been allocated to the Creative Ireland Programme in 2017 and detailed plans for its implementation are currently being drawn up by my Department in consultation with partners across Government and with other key stakeholders. This includes an ambitious plan to deliver several high initiatives by the end of 2017. Further details are available on <http://creative.ireland.ie>.

Wild Fires

954. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the total assessed damage from the recent forest and gorse fires; the amount the damage cost; the way in which habitats will be reinstated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27637/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I would like to thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. Significant environmental damage is caused by wildfires. This issue has become more acute in recent years, as evidenced by the spate of fires in various parts of the country, including a Coillte owned site of some 4,000 hectares Co. Galway in recent weeks.

Wild fires are not a natural phenomenon in Ireland and can have a local impact on species that cannot escape, or that lose breeding habitat as a result. Such impacts are generally fairly short term, but could be very serious for species that are already in decline, such as curlew. Some plant and moss species may be lost temporarily or greatly reduced. I would like to take this opportunity to strongly condemn the recent spate of wildfires and would appeal to members of the public to be conscious of the dangers posed by fire on open ground. The primary responsibility in terms of fire-fighting lies with the Fire Service and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. The prosecution of those responsible is a matter for the Gardaí. My Department is one of a number of agencies represented on the Inter-Agency Gorse Fire Group that explores issues surrounding such fires. An Garda Síochána is also represented on the Group and leads any criminal investigation. My Department, of course, cooperates fully with Garda investigations and any other investigations that may be initiated by other statutory bodies.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

955. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when she will announce successful applicants under the 2017 town and village renewal scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27782/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I launched the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme on 13th April last, with funding of €20 million available to support the revitalisation of up to 300 rural towns and villages over the next 12 months. The scheme is funded by my Department and will be delivered through the Local Authorities. This year's scheme builds on the 2016 programme and a number of changes have been introduced to strengthen its impact. Applications are particularly encouraged from projects which have clear positive economic impacts on a town or village, or which stimulate economic activity between a town and its neighbouring townlands.

Projects which demonstrate leveraging of, or linkages with, complementary schemes oper-

ated by other Departments or agencies in areas such as tourism, heritage or business supports will also be favourably considered.

The closing date for receipt of applications from the Local Authorities is 30th June 2017. My officials will commence the assessment process immediately after this date, with the objective of the successful applicants being announced before the end of July.

Broadband Service Provision

956. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if all local authorities have a broadband officer in place; the way in which this will assist with the delivery of broadband in rural areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27783/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which was published last December, recommended the assignment by each Local Authority of an officer with responsibility for broadband and mobile phone services. The function of this officer is to act as a single point of contact for telecommunications operators on the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure, as well as to increase awareness of, and stimulate demand for, broadband services.

My Department has provided funding to all Local Authorities to support the assignment of a Broadband Officer. To date, 30 of the 31 Local Authorities have appointed a Broadband Officer. I understand that the remaining Local Authority is currently recruiting and is expected to appoint an officer shortly.

The remit of the Broadband Officer is primarily to manage interactions with any company that is seeking to roll out telecommunications infrastructure in their county. The Broadband Officers will also work with the winning bidder(s) in respect of the rollout of the National Broadband Plan in the areas to be covered by State intervention. Broadband Officers are also involved in helping to develop local digital strategies to ensure that full use is made of the new broadband infrastructure once it is in place.

My Department has, additionally, established two regional Action Groups involving all of the Broadband Officers to ensure consistency in their engagement with the telecommunications operators and to identify and address obstacles to the rollout of telecoms infrastructure.

The telecommunications providers have widely welcomed the assignment the Broadband Officers by the Local Authorities and are actively engaging with them.

The appointment of Broadband Officers is just one of 40 actions contained in the report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. Along with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I have been co-chairing an Implementation Group to drive the delivery of the actions in the report. Progress Reports from the Implementation Group will be published on a quarterly basis. The first Progress Report, covering Quarter 1 of 2017, has recently been published on the websites of both my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment .

Film Industry Tax Reliefs

957. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural

and Gaeltacht Affairs the training modules to be provided for trainees submitted by companies as part of their applications for section 481 tax relief in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. [27804/17]

958. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of trainees listed by companies as part of their applications for section 481 tax relief in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. [27805/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 957 and 958 together.

Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 is a tax credit provided by the Irish Government as an incentive to film and television production in Ireland. Under Section 7 of the Film Regulations 2015 (S.I. 4 of 2015), a project must employ on the project a minimum of two trainees for each €355,000 of tax credit claimed, up to a maximum of 8 trainees. In order to obtain the tax relief, producer companies must provide details of the training modules proposed for the trainees and the names of the trainees engaged on the project. As with all requirements under the tax relief scheme, this requirement is monitored by the Revenue Commissioners. Details of recipients of the tax relief including projects and the amounts received are published by the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/reliefs-and-exemptions/film-relief/beneficiaries-of-film-relief.aspx.

959. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of an application for CLÁR funding by a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27806/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31st March last, with a closing date of 5th May. The programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. Successful projects were announced over the last few weeks, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects across four different thematic Measures. I can confirm that the Department received an application in respect of the project referred to by the Deputy and that the application was successful.

Details of all projects approved under the CLÁR programme are available at <http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/clar-2016/>.

The CLÁR programme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, and makes a huge contribution to supporting the most depopulated areas in rural Ireland. Over 800 projects have now been approved for funding since the scheme was re-launched last year.

Action Plan for Rural Development

960. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she has identified towns, villages and regions which may benefit from upgrading such as improvement of street scape, derelict buildings or other issues which may detrimentally affect the appearance of such locations with a view to specifically targeted incentives to address the issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27879/17]

964. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural

and Gaeltacht Affairs the number and location of applications received by her Department from the various local authorities for grant aid towards the upgrading of street scrapes; her plans to award same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27883/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 960 and 964 together.

Vibrant towns and villages are at the heart of our rural communities and will play an important role in revitalising rural Ireland. The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, which was launched on 23rd January last, 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.

One of these measures is the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, which I launched last April, with a focus on improving the economic and social 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 12 months. The scheme is funded by my Department and delivered through the Local Authorities.

The closing date for receipt of applications from the Local Authorities is 30th June. My officials will commence the assessment of applications immediately after this date, with the objective of the successful applicants being announced before the end of July. Details of the successful applicants will be published on-line.

My Department is also developing a pilot initiative to increase residential occupancy in rural town and village centres. It is hoped that this pilot can be launched later this year. The pilot will examine ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town centres, such as vacant or derelict premises, can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purpose. The scheme will be targeted at owner-occupiers. Full details will be announced when the scheme is launched.

Action Plan for Rural Development

961. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the degree to which her Department can address the issues of urban or rural decay throughout the country with particular reference to those areas that have to date not benefitted from the economic recovery and which previously were deemed not to have experienced the economic boom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27880/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development provides a framework for the coordinated delivery of over 270 actions by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies to support the economic and social development of rural areas, many of which have not felt the benefit of economic recovery. From my own Department's perspective, initiatives such as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the CLÁR programme and capital grants for arts and culture centres have all been launched this year. All of these initiatives contribute to the economic and social progress of rural areas. My Department is also developing a pilot initiative to increase residential occupancy in rural town and village centres. It is hoped that this pilot can be launched later this year.

Bodies such as Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Western Development Commission, the Heritage Council, Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Services also contribute to economic development in rural areas through enterprise supports or investment in tourism and

heritage assets.

A key component of the Action Plan for Rural Development is to support the creation of jobs throughout the regions to ensure that people who live in rural areas have increased opportunities for employment locally. The Department of Enterprise and Innovation is delivering the regional Action Plans for Jobs, and Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland have placed a renewed focus on supporting enterprises at regional level. These initiatives will have a positive impact on job opportunities and economic activity in both rural and urban communities across the regions. Recent figures published by the Central Statistics Office show that more than three-quarters of all employment created in the first Quarter of 2017 was outside of Dublin.

The actions set out in the Action Plan for Rural Development are the start of an on-going process which will be built on continuously to unlock the potential of rural Ireland and improve the lives of people who live and work in rural communities.

An Interim Progress Report on the implementation of the Action Plan is available on www.ruralireland.ie and highlights the progress being made across Government to support rural Ireland.

Archaeological Sites

962. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the action which is being taken to address the desecration of historical sites with particular reference to recent events; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27881/17]

963. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which adequate methods exist to protect historic sites; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27882/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 962 and 963 together.

All known archaeological monuments, of which there are in excess of 130,000, are entitled to protection under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004. Protection may be extended to previously unrecorded monuments by entering them in the Register of Historic Monuments or the Record of Monuments and Places. The Acts allow me to make a preservation order where I consider a national monument to be at risk.

As Minister, I am the owner or guardian under the National Monuments Acts of approximately 1,000 national monuments located at approximately 750 sites. Maintenance of such monuments is undertaken on my behalf by the Office of Public Works. Local authorities are responsible under the Acts for maintaining the national monuments of which they are owners or guardians.

My Department records all reports of damage to recorded monuments. Such reports usually emanate from members of the public, local authorities or heritage-based NGOs.

My Department also liaises regularly with the utility and infrastructure providers and has agreed codes of practice with a number of these agencies aimed at safeguarding archaeological sites and monuments. In addition, awareness programmes are in place with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and farm organisations that are aimed at raising awareness in relation to farming and archaeology.

Notwithstanding the wide ranging legal provisions and other programmes in place, damage to archaeological sites and monuments does occur from time to time. Cases involving alleged wilful damage to monuments such as recently occurred at a site in Co. Longford are followed up in liaison with An Garda Síochána.

Prosecutions in respect of damage to recorded monuments are initiated by my Department where warranted and there have been a number of convictions for such offences in recent years.

Question No. 964 answered with Question No. 960.

Arts Funding

965. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she has to date in 2017 responded to various applications from community groups towards their performances and productions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27884/17]

971. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she can assist various local musical and dramatic societies in respect of annual productions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27890/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 965 and 971 together.

Most of my Department's arts and culture budget is allocated to the agencies under its remit. Within these allocations, the Arts Council is the primary State agency for funding the arts in Ireland.

In 2017, I will provide over €65m to the Arts Council, an increase of over 8% since 2016. Details of the Arts Council's expenditure including its individual grants can be viewed on the Arts Council's decisions database which provides a listing of 2007–2017 Arts Council funding decisions. Decisions are routinely published in the Arts Council newsletter, and decisions are also recorded in the Arts Council's annual reports, which are available online.

The Council is statutorily independent in relation to its funding and executive decisions.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme

966. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which full and final agreement has been reached with traditional turf cutters in respect of SACs and NHAs; the number of cases outstanding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27885/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland, like all EU Member States, is bound by the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive. These Directives aim to ensure the protection of habitats and species which have been selected for conservation within special areas of conservation and special protection areas. Significant efforts have been made by the State to resolve the issue of the protection of Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation within the framework of the Habitats Directive. This has included intense and on-going engagement with turf cutting interests, the farming community, non-governmental organisations and with the European Commission, as well as the establishment of a long-term compensation scheme for affected turf cutters.

The National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan 2017-2022 will set out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed, including exploring the options in terms of certain provisions of article 6 of the Habitats Directive. It is intended that the Plan will be published in the coming period, subject to Government approval.

12,411 payments and 901 deliveries of turf have been made in respect of applications received under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme for raised bog special areas of conservation. In addition, 1,738 once-off incentive payments of €500 have been made. 475 payments have been made to applicants from raised bog natural heritage areas under the scheme.

The Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network, published in January 2014, concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. Arising from this review, the Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 has been presented to Dáil Éireann and is currently proceeding through the necessary stages in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Its purpose is to provide for the implementation of a reconfiguration of the natural heritage area network arising from the 2014 Review.

Final resolution of all issues in relation to the protection of Ireland's protected raised bogs will only be brought about by everyone working together, within the law, with my Department and with the Peatlands Council, which was established for the purpose of ensuring the input from all stakeholders.

Film Industry Promotion

967. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to support and encourage the film industry including the use of the island of Ireland as a film location; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27886/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for Irish film making and the Irish film, television and animation industry. Its statutory remit is to assist and encourage the making of film in the State and the development of a film industry in Ireland. The Film Board supports writers, directors and production companies across these sectors by providing investment loans for the development, production and distribution of film, television and animation projects. The Film Board also supports the Irish screen industries at major international markets and festivals, promotes inward investment, the use of Ireland as a location for international production and provides support for companies filming in Ireland. The Board liaises with IDA Ireland and Tourism Ireland to maximise opportunities for the promotion of Ireland as a location for film productions as well as a tourism destination. Information on its funding scheme is available on the Irish Film Board website at www.irishfilmboard.ie.

In Budget 2017, I secured an increase of €2 million for the Irish Film Board, bringing the total allocation for 2017 to over €16m. This increase in funding will allow the Board to invest more in Irish talent and follows on from a very successful year for the Irish film sector, particularly the indigenous film sector, in 2016.

The other primary mechanism through which the Government supports the film industry is Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 - the film tax relief scheme. My Department's investment in the film sector will also help to maximise the benefits brought about by the

Government's enhancement of the Section 481 film tax credit system, including the decision to increase the cap for eligible expenditure on film projects to €70 million, as announced as part of Budget 2016.

The twin approach of direct funding and tax expenditure measures maximises the benefits of Government's support to the audiovisual industry.

In addition to the supports outlined above the Creative Ireland Programme 2017 – 2022 which was announced in December 2016 is a cross-Government initiative to mainstream culture and creativity in the life of the nation and to promote individual, community and national wellbeing.

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

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

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

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

Waterways Issues

968. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which her Department has achieved an amicable solution to outstanding issues between Waterways Ireland and traditional canal dwellers and recreational users; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27887/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As I stated in my replies to Questions No. 437 and 438 from the Deputy on 7 March 2017, and Question 767 on 2 May 2017, Waterways Ireland continues to work closely with boat owners using the canals, canal users, land owners and representative groups. Contact is on-going between Waterways Ireland and the canal users groups, and local communities who support the efforts of Waterways Ireland in the maintenance and operation of the canals.

As the Deputy may be aware, provisions to amend the Canals Act 1986 in order to allow for

the subsequent making of bye laws to regulate boating on the canals and to manage the use of the canals are contained in the Heritage Bill 2016. The proposed changes would allow Waterways Ireland to proactively manage the Royal and Grand Canals and the Barrow Navigation. As the Deputy will be aware, the 1988 Canal Bye Laws have been in force for almost 30 years and need to be revised to reflect changes in the use of the canals over the intervening years.

The Heritage Bill 2016 was passed by Seanad Éireann on the 13th April 2017. Deputies will have the opportunity to consider the Bill as it passes through the various stages of enactment in Dáil Éireann.

Archaeological Sites

969. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the degree to which excavations are planned or in progress at various historical sites with particular reference to the need to maintain the integrity of the sites while maximising the educational and tourism potential. [27888/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The role of the National Monuments Service of my Department is to preserve, protect and promote Ireland's unique archaeological heritage. It fulfills this role through a variety of measures one of which includes the regulation of archaeological excavations in the State.

All archaeological excavations are undertaken under licences issued by the Minister in accordance with S.26 of the National Monuments Act 1930. Such licences are only issued to suitably qualified archaeologists who submit proposals with a sound rationale and methodologies that comply with standards of best practice. Excavations may be carried out at national monuments in my ownership or guardianship to facilitate conservation works and to improve presentation for educational and tourism purposes. Recent excavations carried out for such purposes have included St. John's Castle, Carlingford, Co. Louth, Glendalough Co. Wicklow and at the Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary.

The Department also supports a programme of research excavations through the Standing Committee for Archaeology in the Royal Irish Academy and current projects include excavations at Caherconnell in the Burren, Co. Clare which has become a busy tourist attraction and at Ballynamindra Cave in Co. Waterford.

A number of other research excavations, predominantly organised by the academic sector, have been licensed this year at sites in counties Cork, Kerry, Clare, Galway, Sligo and Mayo.

Arts Funding

970. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which EU grant aid has been sought, remains available or is likely to become available to support various community festivals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27889/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Creative Europe 2014 - 2020 is the European Union's funding programme to support the audiovisual, cultural and creative sectors. It consists of MEDIA and CULTURE sub-programmes as well as a Cross-sectoral strand. The Creative Europe - Culture sub-programme has granted over €13 million in project funding to projects with Irish partners in its first

three years. The majority of the funding available under the Culture sub-programme is via the co-operation projects strand.

To date, at the mid-way point of the Programme, under the co-operation projects strand there have been four Irish festivals involved as partners in projects with a total project grant allocation of just under €3 million:

- Babóro Galway International Children's Festival (Small Size, Performing Arts for Early Years)
- Photo Ireland Festival Ltd (Flaneur – New Urban Narratives)
- First Fortnight Ltd (Networking European Festivals for Mental Life Enhancement)
- Cúirt – Galway Arts Centre (Sharing the Wor(l)D)

The Culture sub-programme also funds EU networks and platforms via operating grants for the lead organisations. Below is a summary of Irish festivals which are members of Creative Europe supported platforms and networks:

- Dublin Dance Festival is a member of the Aerowaves Platform
- Galway Early Music Festival is a member of the European Early Music Network,

Galway Film Fleadh has received €162,750 for the period 2014 - 2016 under the Access to Markets support scheme for the Galway Film Fair – the industry market which runs parallel to the Festival.

A complete list of funding results is published on the Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) website: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/selection-results_en.

Question No. 971 answered with Question No. 965.

Heritage Promotion

972. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she will continue to utilise events of a cultural and heritage nature to promote the national image at home and abroad with particular reference to the need to generate increased interest in such matters amongst young persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27891/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to the answer I gave him on the 2 May last. The position has not changed in the interim. My Department will continue to support a broad range of programmes and initiatives across its remit to promote Ireland's national image, including under the recently published Creative Ireland Programme and Action Plan for Rural Development. In addition, the Department's Culture Ireland programme in particular continues to promote Irish culture on the world stage.

Action Plan for Rural Development

973. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Ru-

ral and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which she has identified the primary issues of concern among community groups in rural or urban settings whose quality of life has been diminished for one reason or another such as rural isolation and urban or rural anti social behaviour; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27892/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In January of this year the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, *Realising our Rural Potential*, was launched. In preparing the Action Plan, my Department conducted an extensive consultation process around the country to seek the views of people in rural Ireland on the issues of concern to them. The Plan addresses many of those concerns and sets out 276 actions to support the economic and social progress of rural Ireland. It includes a range of measures which will contribute significantly to job creation, the enhancement of local services and addressing social inclusion in rural areas. Specific examples of actions which will help those who feel isolated or vulnerable in rural areas include:

Significant investment in the Seniors Alert Scheme, which facilitates valuable community-based support for vulnerable older people living alone.

Investment of €46 million in Garda fleet to ensure that Gardaí are mobile, visible and responsive to prevent and tackle crime.

Provision of support for local strategies across rural Ireland to address suicide and improve mental wellbeing.

Maintaining the network of senior helplines in operation throughout the country, which offer a listening service for older people to help address issues such as loneliness and isolation in rural areas.

Support for 450 Men's Sheds across rural Ireland which provide a safe space where men can gather and participate in their communities, develop social networks and potentially gain new skills and access information.

Continued support and prioritisation of community crime prevention through schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Text Alert.

Implementation of the Action Plan is now well under way and significant progress has been achieved in relation to a number of actions. I recently published an Interim Progress Report on the Action Plan which highlights the developments which have taken place across Government to support rural Ireland. The Interim Progress Report is available at www.ruralireland.ie.

The Action Plan will be built on continuously through the addition of new actions to improve the lives of people who live and work in rural communities. In this regard, Mr. Pat Spillane, as Ambassador for the Action Plan, is meeting rural communities across the country to identify on-going issues of concern to them and he reports back to my Department regularly on his findings.

Appointments to State Boards

974. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under her remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28209/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Public Appointments Service (PAS) operates a dedicated website, www.stateboards.ie, through which it advertises vacancies on State Boards. Since this website was set up in 2014 I have consistently used it to identify suitably qualified members of the public who are interested in serving on boards under my remit as vacancies have arisen. I have not appointed any former TDs to boards under the aegis of my Department in that time.

EU Directives

975. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to the derogation categories under the EU birds directive and the relevant national legislation, if a major review referred to by her in Seanad Éireann on 9 March 2017 of all aspects of the derogations including an examination of circumstances for which their use is both required and necessary is scheduled to occur during 2018; and the timeline for the scope, terms of reference and resources for this review [28074/17]

976. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if comparable circumstances including policy, compliance and operational matters in the UK, other EU member states and internationally with similar demographics and geography will be researched, studied and taken into account in the review of the derogations under the EU birds directive scheduled for 2018. [28075/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 975 and 976 together.

The Birds Directive is implemented in Ireland under the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. Under the terms of the Directive, all Member States of the EU are bound to take measures to protect all wild birds and their habitats. Under Article 9(a) Member States may derogate in the interests of public health and safety; air safety; and to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries and water; and for the protection of flora and fauna.

These derogations are achieved by way of declarations, which are made on an annual basis, under the European Communities (Wildlife Act, 1976) (Amendment) Regulations 1986, as amended, which allows the capturing and killing of some listed bird species in certain situations.

I signed two declarations recently effective from 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018; one allowing the capturing and killing of certain bird species to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock etc and the second declaration relating to air safety.

A major review of the derogations is scheduled for 2018, and this will take account of all relevant factors, including perceived threats, distribution and population data available on the bird species in the derogations. The review will include a public/stakeholder consultation element and will also examine the implementation of the derogations in other EU Member States. Terms of Reference for the review are currently being examined in my Department.

Arts Funding

977. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the lack of artist run studio space and the

fact that the State lags far behind other European countries in this regard. [28083/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am aware of the issue regarding the provision of affordable studio space, particularly as a result of the changing property market. In general, I would consider that local approaches driven by artists, local arts officers and the owners of vacant buildings are best suited to respond to the specific local circumstances involved and provide the most effective outcomes. My Department is involved in ongoing discussions with the Arts Council, Dublin City Council and the OPW to consider some possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches. In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 last year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional studio space in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

In terms of investment by my Department, I recently announced details of more than €9 million in capital funding for 61 arts and culture centres across the country. This capital scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including arts centres, theatres, galleries and museums, as well as artists' studios and creative spaces. Eight of grants relate to artist studios and creative spaces amounting to a total of €850,000. These are set out in the table below.

A full list of organisations to benefit from funding under Stream 1 and 2 of the Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website.

I recently announced a new capital grants Scheme which will provide grants of up to €20,000 to not-for-profit organisations with a defined arts and cultural remit. Organisations with artists' studios will also be eligible to apply under this Scheme. The closing date for this Scheme was Friday 16 June and I hope to make announcements shortly in this regard.

Artists' studios and creative spaces funded under the Arts and Cultural Capital Scheme

-	Amount
Firkin Crane Cork	€150,000
A4 Arts Studio & Community Education Centre Limited, Dublin	€22,800
Fire Station Artists Studio, Dublin	€30,643
Irish Aerial Creation Centre, Limerick	€35,0000
Dance Limerick	€75,015
Custom House Studio	€ 43,274
Old Post Office Clones /Monaghan County council	€144,077
Birr Stage Guild	€32,844
Total	€848,653

National Parks and Wildlife Service Staff

978. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of new staff recruited by the National Parks and Wildlife Service since May 2016; if interviews have been held and panels established for ranger positions at each of national parks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28101/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather

Humphreys): I am advised that there has been significant recruitment across my Department in recent times. Since May 2016 30 staff have been assigned to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and, in addition, 60 seasonal posts have been filled nationwide to cover the busy tourist season in both 2016 and 2017. A recruitment campaign is currently underway to fill posts at Killarney House which will officially open to the public shortly, and further permanent and temporary posts will be filled across the NPWS in the coming weeks. My Department is currently engaged with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) in recruiting Conservation Rangers. I am advised that interviews have been completed and a panel has been created, from which posts will be filled shortly.

Staffing levels across the Department will continue to be kept under regular review in line with emerging business needs and having regard to Government policy on public sector pay and staffing as advised by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Leader Programmes Administration

979. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she is taking to simplify the process for Leader applications and the lengthy steps that each application has to pass through, in view of the fact that the system is slow and not responsive to the needs of applicants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28109/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The LEADER programme is a key part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and has the capacity to deliver significant outcomes for rural areas. I am committed to implementing the LEADER 2014-2020 programme as effectively and as efficiently as possible. However, I am also aware of concerns regarding some of the administrative procedures related to the programme, and I want to see these issues resolved to the greatest extent possible. In this regard, on 17th May last, I hosted a forum with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, to explore the issues of concern to them and to identify potential solutions aimed at streamlining the current administrative and application procedures.

The forum, which was attended by more than 70 people, was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined and where the burden on project applicants could be reduced.

On the basis of the feedback at the forum, I gave a commitment to the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies present that I would implement a number of the suggestions put forward, while being mindful of the regulatory requirements associated with this EU co-financed programme.

My officials have reviewed all of the contributions made at the forum and have identified a substantial number of changes that can be made to improve the delivery of the LEADER programme. I have written to all of the Local Action Groups and Local Development Companies to update them on the changes that we intend to make, in partnership with them in many instances.

My priority, in hosting the recent forum and developing action points for improving the delivery of the programme, has been on facilitating the work of the Local Action Groups and making LEADER funding more accessible for potential project applicants. I am confident that the changes I am planning to introduce will improve the delivery of the LEADER programme to the benefit of rural communities throughout the country, and I expect to see a substantial

increase in project approvals in the second half of 2017.

Action Plan for Rural Development

980. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No.189 of 17 May 2017, the cost of each hub mentioned. [28131/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): As stated in the reply to Parliamentary Question No. 189 of 17th May 2017, these hubs are being advanced as the initial phase of a Gaeltacht digital innovation network which will promote and facilitate enterprise, innovation and remote working throughout the various Gaeltacht regions. I have been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that the following are the projected costs associated with each of the four innovation hubs referred to by the Deputy:

County Donegal: Áislann Ghaoth Dobhair - the direct cost of fitting out and connecting the digital hub element is €73,000.

County Kerry: Mol Tech – Daingean Uí Chúis - to date €28,000 has been invested in this project (by Údarás na Gaeltachta and Kerry County Council) for the refurbishment and fitting out of the building.

Co. Mayo: Digital Unit, Béal an Mhuirthead - this facility is situated in an existing Údarás owned industrial unit on the Industrial Estate in Béal an Mhuirthead. The cost of refurbishment and fit out for this project (work which is now being carried out) is €180,000. This is being funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Co. Galway: Innovation Unit, An Spidéal - Údarás na Gaeltachta has allocated €30,000 towards this project in order to draft detailed plans and obtain necessary permissions.

Postal Codes

981. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent by her Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28133/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that no significant costs have been incurred within my Department to date in relation to the incorporation of Eircodes, as the necessary modifications to existing systems and databases have been carried out in-house. While some incidental costs would have arisen in relation to incorporating the Eircode on departmental stationery, websites and other places where addresses are displayed, these were not significant enough to be recorded separately.

CLÁR Programme

982. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the funding provided in her Department's estimates for the CLÁR programme in 2017; the measures that will be funded; the level of funding allocated to date in 2017; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [28182/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31st March 2017 and will provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. The CLÁR programme is funded under Subhead E5 of my Department's Vote, which has a total allocation of €15.283 million for a number of rural development programmes this year. Funding for the 2017 CLÁR programme is available this year under four separate Measures:

Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure

Measure 4: First Responder Supports

Applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3 were submitted through the Local Authorities, while Measure 4 was targeted at voluntary organisations involved in emergency rescue or first-response efforts. The closing date for applications under the 2017 CLÁR programme was 5th May 2017 and over 500 **applications were received across the four measures.**

Successful projects were announced over the last few weeks, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects across the four Measures. Details of the approved projects are available on the Rural Affairs pages of the website www.ahrrga.gov.ie. Payments will, in general, be made to the successful applicants on a phased basis when the projects have commenced and have achieved a satisfactory level of progress.

The CLÁR programme is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development, and makes a huge contribution to supporting the most depopulated areas in rural Ireland. Over 800 projects have now been approved for funding since the scheme was re-launched last year.

Arts Council

983. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if local authority arts officer positions are filled; and if the position is a full time one, by county. [28256/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have no remit for appointing arts officers. The Arts Council, which is funded by my Department, provides support to local authorities directly for arts programming. Details of all local authority arts officers are published and available on the Arts Council website at www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Local-Arts/Links/.

Arts Funding

984. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the yearly budget allocated to Culture Ireland; and the number of staff allocated per annum to the programme since 2008. [28258/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of the funding allocated to the Culture Ireland Division of my Department since 2008 is outlined in the table below. The number of staff working in Culture Ireland was five in 2008 and this increased to the current complement of seven to cover **increased workload including the delivery** of the special programmes, *Imagine Ireland* in 2011 in the US; *Culture Connects*, the Culture Programme marking Ireland's Presidency of the EU in 2013; and *I Am Ireland*, the Centenary Programme in 2016. Culture Ireland Funding

Year	€m	Notes
2008	4.75	
2009	4.5	
2010	5	€4 m core, plus €1m once-off provision for Imagine Ireland Programme
2011	7	€4m core, plus €3m once-off provision for Imagine Ireland Programme
2012	4.3	Including €0.8 towards EU Presidency Culture Programme
2013	4	Including €0.8 towards EU Presidency Culture Programme
2014	2.5	
2015	2.5	
2016	5	Including €2.5m for I Am Ireland Centenary Programme
2017	3.5	

National Monuments

985. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the steps she will take to ensure that the remains of the oak wood roadway in Mayne Bog, County Westmeath is fully protected; her views on whether this area of national importance should be placed in the national record of monuments and places list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28422/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 426 on 7 March 2017. Officials from the National Monuments Service of my Department continue to work with both the owners of the bog and the local authority with the aim of preserving intact and uncompromised sections of the togher.

Film Industry

986. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the authority under which the quality of training qualifications within the film industry here are managed; the accrediting body; the number of persons working in the film industry here; the number of persons that work in projects receiving investment from the Irish Film Board; the number of persons that work in projects receiving investment emanating from section 481 tax exemption process; the number of these that are contractors; and the number that are direct employees. [28536/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government supports the Irish audiovisual industry through the Irish Film Board and through Section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 - the film tax relief scheme. This twin approach of direct funding and tax expenditure measures maximises the benefits of Government's support to the audiovisual industry. The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for Irish film making and the Irish film, television and animation industry. Screen Training Ireland is part the Irish Film Board and is the national training and development resource specifically created for Ireland's film and television industry. Screen Training Ireland works with national and internationally recognised industry professionals to identify, design and deliver training for Irish professionals. Training programmes are offered to enhance expertise in film, television, animation and interactive screen content.

Section 481 is an incentive to film and television production in Ireland. One of the requirements for receipt of the tax relief is the employment of trainees by the producer company. Specifically, the project must employ a minimum of two trainees for each €355,000 of corporation tax credit claimed, up to a maximum of 8 trainees.

In order to obtain the tax relief, producer companies must provide details of the training modules proposed for the trainees and the names of the trainees engaged on the project. As with all requirements under the tax relief scheme, this requirement is monitored by the Revenue Commissioners. Details of recipients of the tax relief including projects and the amounts received are published by the Revenue Commissioners at

www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/reliefs-and-exemptions/film-relief/beneficiaries-of-film-relief.aspx.

In relation to employment figures in the audiovisual industry, my Department has engaged consultants Olsberg SPI Ltd in association with Nordicity to carry out an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries. It has been some years since a comprehensive study of the sector was carried out. The study is examining, inter alia, employment in the Irish film, TV and animation sector. The commissioning of the study is committed to in the Action Plan for Jobs 2016.

A steering group led by my Department, with representatives of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the Irish Film Board and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland are liaising with the consultants. I understand that the Study is nearing completion.

Arts Funding

987. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department has carried out an audit of State institutions and organisations in receipt of public funding to measure their levels of access to arts audiences and practitioners with disabilities; and if so, the results of same. [28547/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts, including arts participation, throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council. The strategic context for the Arts Council's support of arts participation and all other artforms and areas of arts practice is set out in *Making Great Art Work: Arts Council Strategy (2016–2025)*. This strategy describes how the Council will lead the development of the arts in Ireland over the next decade. This strategy has five priority areas: the artist; public engagement; invest-

ment strategy; spatial and demographic planning; and developing capacity.

The Arts Council funds a number of key organisations and agencies that have a central role in supporting these strands of work, including Create; Arts & Disability Ireland; Age & Opportunity and Waterford Healing Arts Trust.

I understand the Arts Council's arts and disability policy is due to be reviewed and updated in the context of the council's new ten year strategy, which is expected to be published in the coming months. The issue of carrying out an audit would be a matter for the Arts Council to consider in the context of its policy.

National Cultural Institutions also respond through their programmes to develop wider access including for people with disabilities. In this context it be noted that my Department has also been engaged with the National Council for the Blind of Ireland to consider the needs of the visually impaired. My Department will continue to work with the Council of National Cultural Institutions to encourage the development of access to all audiences.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

988. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if all State bodies under the aegis of her Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28663/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that all of the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department have confirmed that they are tax compliant for the year 2015. In relation to the 2016 accounts all of those Bodies which have submitted accounts to date are also in compliance. There are a number of Bodies which have yet to submit their 2016 accounts due to differing statutory deadline requirements, but all will be requested to confirm compliance with tax laws in accordance with the code of practice for the governance of State Bodies. In the interest of completeness, An Foras Teanga and Waterways Ireland are North South bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement, and therefore come under the jurisdiction of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). While the Bodies are under the aegis of my Department, they should not be subject to the domestic requirements of either jurisdiction, but rather the requirements agreed by the NSMC.

Dormant Accounts Fund Grants

989. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the status of an application by an organisation (details supplied) for funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28906/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In February 2017, Pobal, on behalf of my Department, invited applications for funding under the Social Enterprise measure of the Dormant Accounts Action Plan. The aim of the Social Enterprise measure is to increase the impact of social enterprises by enhancing their capacity to delivery services and generate traded income through the provision of small capital grants and capacity support funding.

Arising out of the call for proposals, a total of 193 applications were received. The call was significantly oversubscribed. Based on a comprehensive independent assessment and ranking of the applications by Pobal against the published assessment criteria, Dormant Accounts funding was disbursed to total of 42 projects. The cumulative grant value of these projects is €1.648 million. Pobal have written to all applicants to inform them of the decision.

Due to the level of interest in the measure, only the highest scoring applications were successful in being approved for funding. Unfortunately, the project in question did not meet the required level to be funded on this occasion.

Dormant Accounts Fund Grants

990. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if a charity (details supplied) is to be considered for funding under the dormant accounts fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28937/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post), and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings. The Dormant Accounts Fund is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency. The Acts provide for the disbursement of funds for the purposes of programmes or projects to assist:

- the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
- the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged; or
- persons with a disability.

My Department's role in relation to the Dormant Accounts Fund is to prepare a Disbursement Scheme every three years, setting out the objectives to be achieved by making disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund and the strategies for achieving those objectives. My Department also co-ordinates the preparation of annual Action Plans in line with the three-year Disbursement Scheme. The Action Plans contain the details of specific programmes and projects to be funded across Government Departments with the support of the Dormant Accounts Fund. It is a matter for the relevant Government Departments to advertise the details of their programmes and invite applications for funding once the Action Plan is approved each year.

My Department is currently finalising a new Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 2017, following a detailed consultation process across Government Departments. It would appear that any funding available from the Dormant Accounts Fund for the organisation referred to by the Deputy might be appropriate to schemes operated by the Department of Health. Any further enquiries in relation to the matter would be best addressed to that Department.

Scéimeanna Rannach

991. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an dtabharfaidh sí míniú maidir le cén fáth nár ceadaíodh aon airgead i gClár Caipitil na nOileán d'oileáin i nDún na nGall; an dtabharfaidh sí míniú maidir le cén fáth, i ndiaidh cuairt le gairid ón Aire Stáit ar na hoileáin atá i gceist, agus na ndearb-

huithe a tugadh, nach raibh na hoileáin san áireamh sa chlár maoinithe; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [29019/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Níos túisce i mbliana, d'iarr mo Roinn ar údaráis áitiúla ábhartha iarratais a chur chuici ar chomh-mhaoiniú ó mo Roinn chun cláir mhionoibreacha ar na oileáin a chur i gcrích. Fuarthas iarratais ó Chomhairlí Chontae Chorcaí, na Gaillimhe, Mhaigh Eo, Shligigh agus Dhún na nGall. Mar is eol don Teachta, d'fhógair mé deontais d'os cionn €800,000 ina n-iomláine an tseachtain seo caite do cheithre cinn de na comhairlí sin. Tá iarratas Chomhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall á mheas ag mo Roinn go fóill agus breis faisnéise iarrtha aici ón gComhairle ina thaobh. Ach an fhaisnéis bhreise a bheith faighte ag mo Roinn, bheifí muiníneach go mbeifí ábalta fógra dearfach maidir le hoileáin Dhún na nGall a dhéanamh gan mhoill.

Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga

992. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an dtabharfaidh sí cuntas ar an dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga, go háirithe maidir leis na poist bhreise a cheadaigh an tAire ach nár líonadh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [29020/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Tugadh le fios sa bhfreagra ar Cheist Dála Uimhir 689 ar 2 Bealtaine 2017 go bhfuil sé aontaithe leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna go ndéanfar athbhreithniú ar Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga mar chuid den Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022. Mar chéad céim den athbhreithniú seo, tá Coiste Stiúrtha curtha le chéile le hionadaithe ó mo Roinn, ón Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, ón gComhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta agus ó Gaeloideachas Teo. chun téarmaí tagartha don athbhreithniú a aontú agus a chur faoi mo bhráid le bheith faofa. Táthar ag súil leis an athbhreithniú seo a bheith déanta sa bhliain reatha. Is iad Muintearas Teo. agus Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne a dhéanann riaradh ar an scéim seo faoina nglactar le hiarratais ó scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht. Bím sásta i bprionsabal cúnaimh a chur ar fáil faoin scéim do scoileanna a chomhlíonann critéir na scéime ach gach cás ar leith a bheith pléite le mo Roinn agus aontaithe leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, i gcomhthéacs an athbhreithnithe thuasluaite agus an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta.

Scéim na mBóithre Áise

993. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta sí cur síos ar na pleananna atá aici Scéim na mBóithre Áise a chur ar bun an athuir do bhóithre nach bóithre contae iad, bóithre áise a fhad le tithe agus feirmeacha i gceantar na Gaeltachta; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [29021/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): Mar a tugadh le fios sa bhfreagra ar Cheist Dála Uimhir 382 and 383 ar 30 Bealtaine 2017 is i gcomhthéacs fhorfheidhmiú na Straitéise 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030, atá áirithe go sonrach mar sprioc i gClár an Rialtais Rannpháirtíochta, a dhéanfar aon chinneadh maidir le hathnuachan ar Scéim na mBóithre Áise.

Western Development Commission Funding

994. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the current and capital allocations given in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017 to the Western Development Commission, in tabular form; if there is a budget line for each county under the geographic remit of the Commission. [29027/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The current and capital allocations for the Western Development Commission from 2010 to 2017 are detailed on Table 1 below. The figures reflect the published Revised Estimates Volume for each of the years in question. There is no individual budget line for each county under the geographic remit of the Commission.

Table 1 – REV allocations 2010-2017, Western Development Commission

Year	Current €000	Capital €000	Total €000
2010	1,738	-	1,738
2011	1,549	-	1,549
2012	1,545	-	1,545
2013	1,531	-	1,531
2014	1,521	-	1,521
2015	1,488	-	1,488
2016	1,488	1,000	2,488
2017	1,495	1,000	2,495

Departmental Staff Relocation

995. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff under the remit of her Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29032/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that the table outlines the number of staff in my Department that have applied to be transferred to locations outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017. No cost has been incurred by my Department.

Year	Total
2014	0
2015	1
2016	2
2017	0

I am further advised that no staff in any of the State agencies under my remit applied to be transferred to locations outside of Dublin in the period concerned.

Architectural Heritage

996. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Aldborough House on Portland Row a listed building is in a state of disrepair; if she will ensure that the owners will fully comply with their obligations to preserve this protected structure; and if she will make a statement on

the matter. [29048/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets. Part IV of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides for the protection of architectural heritage. The Act gives primary responsibility to planning authorities to identify and protect the architectural heritage by including relevant structures on the Record of Protected Structures. Inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures places a duty of care on the owners and occupiers of protected structures and also gives planning authorities powers to deal with development proposals affecting them and to seek to safeguard their future. As Minister, I draw on information provided by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, maintained by my Department, to recommend structures for inclusion on the Record of Protected Structures. However, the final decision is a reserved function of the planning authority.

There is a duty of owners and occupiers to protect such structures from endangerment. Where structures become endangered or unauthorised development has been or is being carried out, the planning authority has the powers to take appropriate action. In respect of the building mentioned, I understand that Dublin City Council remains in contact with the owner in relation to the building.

My Department provided funding of €80,587 to Dublin City Council under the Structures at Risk Fund in 2011 for repairs to the roof of the building in question, to which the Council added €20,000.

Services for People with Disabilities

997. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to reduce the waiting times of eight to ten months for a child to access the services of an early intervention team in the Dublin south west area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28826/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

998. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is in the public interest for a company (details supplied) to restrict access to the clinics services to its own subscribers in view of the recent approval by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission for the company to take full ownership of the clinics and of the State's share in the company. [26831/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Vhi recently received clearance from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission in relation to its proposal to acquire the 50% interest in the Vhi Swiftcare Clinics that it does not already own. This advance clearance was required by competition legislation and it now allows Vhi to proceed with the transaction, which is expected to be finalised shortly.

As Minister for Health I have no role in the day-to-day operation of any of the private health insurance companies. Health insurers operate in a competitive market and are free to include certain terms and conditions in their policies, providing they are in compliance with the health insurance legislation.

Land Transfers

999. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will intervene in the hold up of the transfer of land at a school (details supplied) from his Department to the Department of Education which was agreed in January 17 and has since not progressed and is holding up the provision of car parking at the school complex. [27894/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

National Maternity Strategy

1000. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the additional measures which can be taken to ensure that maternity and children's hospitals promote breastfeeding. [28316/17]

1406. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of IBCLC licensed lactation consultants here; and the number of lactation consultants employed. [28304/17]

1407. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals that have a fulltime dedicated lactation consultant with IBCLC qualifications. [28305/17]

1408. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the best modern practice for training paediatricians, public nurses and general practitioners involving breastfeeding. [28306/17]

1409. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that health professionals such as paediatricians, public nurses and general practitioners meet the WHO standard on breastfeeding training. [28307/17]

1410. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which can be taken to guarantee that health insurances will cover visits by an IBCLC licensed lactation consultant to ensure mothers can access help for breastfeeding. [28308/17]

1411. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals that would pass the baby friendly hospital initiative; and the number that would fail same. [28309/17]

1412. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the measures which are being taken to ensure that the new maternity hospital at St Vincent's hospital is promoting breastfeeding. [28310/17]

1413. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of maternity hospitals

here that provide free industrial grade breast pumps for breastfeeding. [28311/17]

1414. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of maternity hospitals that have industrial grade breast pumps to rent; and the cost to rent the breast pumps. [28312/17]

1415. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of maternity hospitals that do not have industrial grade breast pumps for breastfeeding. [28313/17]

1416. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of regional breastfeeding coordinators that have been created to keep up with the standards of the 2021 breastfeeding action plan. [28314/17]

1417. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the 2021 breastfeeding action plan will be met; and the person or body that has responsibility to make sure the plan is following a proper timeframe for success. [28315/17]

1418. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to promote breastfeeding support groups and access to breastfeeding counselling before and after a child is born. [28317/17]

1419. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which can be taken to promote breastfeeding in educational systems to combat the negative stigma involving breastfeeding. [28318/17]

1420. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which will be taken to ensure limited promotion of formula food in educational textbooks. [28319/17]

1421. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which will be taken to eliminate personal bias that some healthcare professionals have towards the promotion of breastfeeding. [28320/17]

1422. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce psychological debriefing for healthcare professionals that need it to ensure they can properly promote breastfeeding. [28321/17]

1424. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which will be taken to eliminate the negative stigma of lactation consultants in the medical community such as pay gaps or awareness of importance. [28323/17]

1425. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps that will be taken to ensure that women have facilities and time to breastfeed and store breastmilk while at work. [28324/17]

1426. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the additional measures which will be implemented to ensure working mothers have proper breastfeeding support when returning to the workplace for at least the first year. [28325/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1000, 1406 to 1422, inclusive, and 1424 to 1426, inclusive together.

Some of the matters raised by the deputy are largely encompassed in the recent Health Service Executive publication entitled Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland: the HSE Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016 - 2021.

This Action Plan sets out the priority areas to be addressed over the next 5 years to improve breastfeeding supports, to enable more mothers in Ireland to breastfeed and to improve health outcomes for mothers and children in Ireland. The Action Plan outlines the actions needed to enhance breastfeeding rates and provide skilled supports to mothers, through our maternity services, hospitals, primary care services and in partnership with voluntary breastfeeding organisations and other stakeholders.

These actions include the implementation of policies at hospital and community level; investment in breastfeeding training and skills development for healthcare staff; the provision of additional lactation specialist posts; and partnership working to promote a culture that accepts and supports breastfeeding. The Action Plan is available at www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf.

I am also pleased to advise the deputy that breastfeeding initiatives are also reflected in the *Creating a Better Future Together: National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026*. This national strategy emphasised the importance of dedicated staff, such as the HSE National Breastfeeding Coordinator and the wider team of lactation consultants, and statutory and voluntary supports, in promoting and supporting breastfeeding in Ireland. It referred to the National Breastfeeding Coordinator that works with a national committee to oversee the implementation of breastfeeding action plans and monitors progress in relation to breastfeeding targets; liaising with local breastfeeding committees, maternity hospitals, community health services and voluntary breastfeeding organisations.

Initiatives referred to in the national strategy included an annual National Breastfeeding Week, the HSE website www.breastfeeding.ie, and an on-line Ask the Expert support service provided by International Board Certified Lactation Consultants. Other initiatives mentioned included breastfeeding support groups, the development of a breastfeeding competencies framework, and a breastfeeding policy for primary care teams and community healthcare settings.

Moreover, the National Maternity Strategy reiterated that along with practical supports that can be provided to mothers, such as supports to continue breastfeeding on return to the workplace, a broader societal change is required in order to promote a more positive culture around breastfeeding. This should support women to feel confident about their choice to breastfeed. The Maternity Strategy emphasised that this includes engaging extended family members and childminders who, perhaps due to not being aware of the importance of breastfeeding, may not be best informed to support a family's choice to feed their baby expressed breast milk while in their care. It referred to breastfeeding promotion campaigns that should be tailored and targeted to help the wider community, including family members, childminders and employers, to play their role in improving Ireland's breastfeeding initiation and duration rates.

I want to also assure the deputy that the recently published Dept. of Justice and Equality National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 - 2020: *creating a better society for all*, contains two actions on increasing the proportion of mothers who breastfeed.

One of the actions is to extend provision for breastfeeding breaks under employment legislation (currently available to mothers of children under 6 months). The other action is to implement the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016 - 2021 to advance public support of breastfeeding.

Finally, as the range of questions from the deputy relate in the main to service issues, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

1001. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons supported under the nursing home support scheme in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28337/17]

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.

Disease Awareness

1002. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health when he expects the HSE health protection surveillance centre's Lyme borreliosis subcommittee to issue its report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28578/17]

1003. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the number of meetings of the HSE health protection surveillance centre's Lyme borreliosis subcommittee held to date in 2017; if meetings are planned for the remainder of 2017. [28579/17]

1118. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a public health programme on Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26950/17]

1137. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to enlighten persons regarding Lyme disease, its effects and the way in which it is contracted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26995/17]

1194. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with Lyme disease; his and the HSE's strategy for dealing with the problem; the supports that are available for those affected by the disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27244/17]

1571. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28968/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1002, 1003, 1118, 1137, 1194 and 1571 together.

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

Lyme borelliosis was made been statutorily notifiable in Ireland by the Infectious Diseases (Amendment Regulations) Regulations 2011 (S.I. no 452 of 2011). The notifiable entity is Lyme neuroborreliosis, the more severe neurological form of Lyme borelliosis. The HPSC of the HSE collects and collates surveillance data on notifiable infectious diseases. The number of annual neuroborreliosis notifications over the last few years is as follows:

- 2012 - 08 cases;
- 2013 - 13 cases;
- 2014 - 18 cases;

- 2015 - 12 cases;
- 2016 - 21 cases (provisional).

Since 2013, the HPSC has held an annual ‘Lyme Awareness Week’ at the beginning of the tick biting season, the purpose of which is to draw attention - particularly in the media - to Lyme disease and the ticks that can spread this disease. This year Lyme Disease week took place between 18 - 22 May. It is normally held at this time of the year to raise awareness before people engage in outdoor activities such as ramblers, campers, mountain bikers, and others who work and walk in forested or grassy, which bring them into contact with ticks. Advice is given on how to avoid tick bites, and on what to do if you are bitten. Further information is available on the HPSC website - www.hpsc.ie and on twitter.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC has established a Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee, the aim of which is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, Occupational Health an Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency, an Environmental Health Officer and, very importantly, a representative from Tick Talk Ireland, the primary Support Group for Lyme disease in Ireland. The Sub-Committee first met on 6 May 2015 and it is expected to report in 2017.

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

Legislative Measures

1004. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 126 of 11 April 2017 and 774 of 2 May 2017, the progress of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill; if it will be published by the end of June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28587/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As was outlined in the responses to parliamentary questions 126 of 11 April 2017, and 774 of 2 May 2017, it is envisaged that a draft of the General Scheme of legislative provisions on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated research will be completed by the end of June 2017.

As the Deputy will be aware the publication of draft legislation is subject to the approval of the Government. When the Scheme is finalised, I intend to submit a memo to Government seeking approval of the General Scheme, which would encompass permission for its publication and submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee to undergo pre-legislative scrutiny.

Health Reports

1005. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.5 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the position regarding the

availability of non-invasive diagnostic imaging facilities, in addition to echocardiography, catheterisation and angiography; the position regarding the availability of investigative and angiographic laboratories; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28750/17]

1492. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.1 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of persons with ST elevation myocardial infarction; the status of the development of an emergency medical system to link a network of hospitals having cardiac facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28746/17]

1493. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.2 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of assessments for thrombolysis; the status of the programme to train general practitioners for appropriate roles in pre-hospital emergency care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28747/17]

1494. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.3 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28748/17]

1495. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.4 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28749/17]

1496. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.6 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of the reconfiguration of coronary care units; if a review has taken place of the changing pattern of need and supply for acute cardiac care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28751/17]

1497. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.6 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of the reconfiguration of coronary care units; if a review has taken place of the changing pattern of need and supply for acute cardiac care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28752/17]

1498. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.7 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of the development of protocols to ensure provision of individualised patient treatment plans in intensive cardiac care units, incorporating education of patients within a tailored, phased rehabilitative framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28753/17]

1499. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.8 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28754/17]

1500. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of moves from emergency in hospital care to accessible ambulatory specialist care that supports proactive care by general practitioners and primary care teams; the restructuring which has been done in this regard; the models of shared care which have been established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28755/17]

1501. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.12 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the plans which have been developed for service reconfiguration; the way this is progressing; the status of population based cardiac networks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28756/17]

1502. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.13 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the position regarding the availability of beds dedicated within intensive cardiac care units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28757/17]

1503. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.14 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28758/17]

1504. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.15 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28759/17]

1505. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.16 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the status of the service needs review for GUCH patients; the status of the service development plan; the way it is progressing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28760/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1005 and 1492 to 1505, inclusive, together.

As these matters relate to hospital services for cardiovascular disease they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Primary Medical Certificates Data

1006. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary medical certificate applications submitted in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county; and the number of certificates granted, in tabular form. [28856/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1007. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26524/17]

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

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

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1008. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to add congenital neutropenia to the long-term illness list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26526/17]

1025. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health his plans to add motor neuron disease to the long term illness list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26585/17]

1098. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason motor neuron disease is not covered under the long term illness scheme; and if he will review this matter with the intention of adding motor neuron disease to the scheme [26862/17]

1281. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the long-term illness scheme available to persons who suffer from pulmonary fibrosis; and if persons that suffer from this condition could obtain medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27751/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1008, 1025, 1098 and 1281 together.

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

1009. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26536/17]

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.

Hospital Staff Data

1010. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed at the maternity unit in Mayo University Hospital by job title; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26539/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff

1011. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there are vacancies in the maternity unit at Mayo University Hospital; if so, the number; when they will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26540/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff Data

1012. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if staffing numbers in the maternity unit at Mayo University Hospital are at an adequate level to provide a safe service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26541/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff Data

1013. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff currently employed on a temporary contract at the maternity unit in Mayo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26542/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff Data

1014. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed on a full-time contract at the maternity unit in Mayo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26543/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Prices

1015. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the pharmaceutical products used by the HSE exclusively available from UK manufacturers; the annual cost of these products; the risks to ongoing availability in the case of no agreement being reached in Brexit negotiations; if contingency planning is in place for these products; the expected timeline for accreditation of these products in this scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26556/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on the issues raised that relate to the agency. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

The medicines regulator, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), is currently working to identify the key risks to continued availability of medicines under different Brexit scenarios. In parallel with this work, the HPRA is examining the feasibility of a number of risk mitigation measures to avoid delays in medicines authorisation and to protect the availability of medicines on the Irish market.

Disease Management

1016. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the system for identifying Lyme disease; the treatment options; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26573/17]

1017. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a method (details supplied) of detecting Lyme disease; if consideration will be given to introducing a similar system here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26574/17]

1136. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the adequate tests which are done to diagnose Lyme disease; if Lyme disease is diagnosed, the supports and treatments offered to those that are suffering from the disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26994/17]

1141. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will consider recognition of the elispot test on Lyme disease completed by an organisation (details supplied) in Germany, which holds ISO15189:2014 certification to carry out examinations in this area. [27000/17]

1144. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if he will develop a strategy on Lyme disease in cooperation with stakeholders including the areas of education for health workers, testing and diagnosis and treatment protocols; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27004/17]

1555. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) in relation to Lyme disease. [28917/17]

1560. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take regarding the lack of adequate testing for the diagnosis of Lyme disease in view of the fact that many persons are forced to travel abroad to receive a diagnosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28923/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1016, 1017, 1136, 1141, 1144, 1555 and 1560 together.

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

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

I. There is not enough scientific evidence that they are suitable tests to diagnose Lyme disease;

II. There is no standard method to perform and interpret these kind of tests; and

III. Positive results in these kinds of tests may be due to other illnesses or conditions and not just *Borrelia* infection.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered.

In Ireland, treatment by most clinicians is based on that laid out in evidence-based guidelines for the management of patients with Lyme disease, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (formerly known as human granulocytic ehrlichiosis), and babesiosis published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) in 2006. This pharmacological regime can be summarised thus:

- Doxycycline, amoxicillin or cefuroxime for the treatment of adults with early localized or early disseminated Lyme disease associated with erythema migrans, in the absence of specific neurologic manifestations (ceftriaxone in early Lyme disease for adults with acute neurologic disease manifested by meningitis or radiculopathy);

- Doxycycline, amoxicillin, or cefuroxime for adults with Lyme arthritis but without clinical evidence of neurologic disease;

- For late neurological disease in adults - intravenous ceftriaxone, cefotaxime or Penicillin G.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the 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. The Sub-

Committee first met on 6 May 2015 and it is expected to report in 2017.

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

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

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

Disease Management

1018. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if German results in respect of Lyme disease detection for persons (details supplied) will be accepted here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26575/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland there is no requirement for people to travel to other EU Member States to access these services. The question that the Deputy raises relates to an individual case, therefore it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply.

Disease Management

1019. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons who have tested positive for Lyme disease in another jurisdiction are permitted to donate blood here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26576/17]

1188. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if persons suffering from Lyme disease can receive treatment outside the State (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some persons with this disease are blood donors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27220/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1019 and 1188 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to question number 181 on 10 May 2017 which sets out the position concerning Lyme disease and blood donation.

Services for People with Disabilities

1020. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the appropriate length of time a child should be waiting for an early years assessment in County Westmeath. [26577/17]

1021. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the appropriate length of time a child should be waiting for a school years assessment in County Westmeath. [26578/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1020 and 1021 together.

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

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

1022. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the appropriate length of time an adult should be waiting for an adult assessment in County Westmeath. [26579/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Provision

1023. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of respite care beds in counties Longford and Westmeath; and the length of the waiting list for each county. [26580/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

1024. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 805 of 21 March 2017, if he will arrange for a reply to be issued by the HSE. [26584/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy. I have asked the HSE to reply to you as a matter of urgency.

Question No. 1025 answered with Question No. 1008.

Ambulance Service Staff

1026. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 205 of 18 May 2017, if there is policy or regulation in existence which prohibits paramedics deployed from Northern Ireland providing treatment according to their qualified skill set to persons when dispatched to attend calls here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26587/17]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

1027. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will advise a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26588/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

1028. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has had home care hours taken from them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26589/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

1029. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 799 of 2 May 2017, the position regarding this situation in view of the fact that there are

now 20 vehicles lying idle while a service (details supplied) does its best to cope with a taxi service to fill the gaps that is not covering the shortages [26607/17]

1175. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the dispute which has resulted in transport vehicles lying idle due to being untaxed at a location (details supplied); if there is a resolution in sight; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27173/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1029 and 1175 together.

The HSE is the responsible State body in relation to motor tax arrangements for any vehicles under its remit. Recently, the relevant policy unit in the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government requested further clarification in relation to whether HSE vehicles can continue to avail of the “state owned” exemption from motor tax.

Discussions are continuing between the HSE and the relevant motor tax policy division, with a view to concluding at the earliest opportunity.

Garda Vetting Applications

1030. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the issue of Garda vetting and the associated assessment of applications is the reason for the delay in filling vacancies at a community hospital (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26616/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Medicinal Products Supply

1031. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the HSE’s deliberations on the provision of a drug (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26619/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Staff Data

1032. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses and midwives who sought proof of registration from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland in order to allow them to practice abroad in each of the past six years; his views on the large number of nurses and midwives that are travelling abroad to work after qualifying; his plans to retain them here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26620/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I would like to advise the Deputy of the number of Certificates of Current Professional Status (CCPS) issued for each year from 2012 to 2016 and to 13 June 2017 - these are set out in the table below:

- 2012 - 2,059;
- 2013 - 1,591;
- 2014 - 1,173;
- 2015 - 977;
- 2016 - 1,059;
- 2017 - 491 (up to 13 June).

It should be noted that nurses and midwives request this Certificate when they are intending to work abroad. However, it should be noted that nurses and midwives who receive this Certificate do not in all cases actually travel abroad - some of them may for a variety of reasons decide to stay in Ireland instead of travelling.

Under proposals agreed at the WRC between this Department, DPER, the HSE, the INMO and SIPTU management have committed to increases in the HSE's National Workforce Plan for nurses and midwives in 2017. Management are to increase the nursing and midwifery workforce in 2017, through a broad range of initiatives that will result in the delivery of 1,208 additional permanent posts; including the conversion of agency employed staff into HSE direct employees, and offering all graduating nurses and midwives full time contracts.

Other key measures agreed include improved maternity leave cover; a career break scheme; 130 additional undergraduate places in 2017; and offering nurses and midwives improved educational opportunities and career pathways which will support recruitment and retention in the medium and long term.

A Section 10 Direction was placed before the Houses of Oireachtas in respect of the agreement. The HSE will have to report to the Minister for Health on the performance and implementation of these arrangements as part of the 2017 National Service Plan. The HSE will also have to provide special reports by June, September and December 2017 on the recruitment of the posts provided in the workforce plan.

A HSE Circular has issued that allows delegation of recruitment to Directors of Nursing. A High Level Group with an independent chair has been established to oversee implementation of this agreement.

The above is in addition to the many other initiatives currently underway to improve nursing and midwifery staffing levels throughout the country. The number of nursing and midwifery staff increased by 113 WTEs from the end of March to the end of April and by 714 WTEs since the end of 2016. Overall nursing WTEs are at the highest levels since 2011 with numbers increasing since 2015 notwithstanding intense global competition for our nurses and midwives.

Dental Services Staff

1033. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the actions he is taking to recruit a dentist for a health centre (details supplied); the way in which the fourth and sixth class dental check at schools will be undertaken while the position remains vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26623/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

1034. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fund works at a location (details supplied) in order to assist the home to comply with the latest HIQA report; if his Department's officials will assist with all of the persons involved who are deeply distressed by the HSE's actions and press release on the matter. [26624/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

1035. **Deputy Robert Troy** 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. [26645/17]

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

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

National Drugs Strategy Publication

1036. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the reason the publication of the national drugs and alcohol strategy has been delayed; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26646/17]

1210. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which additional resources will be allocated for alcohol treatment and rehabilitation in the new national drug strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27361/17]

1211. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the resources which will be allocated to community action on alcohol in the new national drug strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27362/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1036, 1210 and 1211 together.

The Government is committed to putting a new drugs strategy in place this year.

The Strategy will be based on a health-led approach to the drug problem and build on progress achieved under previous drug strategies. A Steering Committee has been established to advise me on a new strategy with a view to developing 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.

The Steering Committee last met on 25 May to discuss some outstanding issues. I understand that the final report will be submitted to me shortly. I hope to be in a position to bring my proposals to Government on the new Strategy thereafter. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on resources until the Strategy has been approved by Government.

Services for People with Disabilities

1037. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a full-time care application for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [26661/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

1038. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for practice support subsidies by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26663/17]

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

Prescriptions Charges

1039. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 205 and 207 of 25 May 2017, which were referred to the HSE and in view of the fact that the HSE was unable to provide an answer, if he will refer the questions to the relevant body for answer. [26664/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention, however the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. It is being collated by the HSE and I will forward it to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Staff Data

1040. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff vacancies in Tallaght hospital; the categories of vacancy; the length of time each post has been vacant; the impact each category of vacancy is having on waiting lists and service delivery; and the measures being taken by the hospital and the HSE to address these vacancies. [26666/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1041. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an appointment for a person (details supplied) in Our Lady's hospital, Navan. [26667/17]

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

1042. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be called for surgery at Letterkenny university hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26669/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1043. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be called for an operation at Letterkenny university hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26670/17]

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

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

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

Health Research Board Expenditure

1044. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the annual expenditure on health care related research; the annual expenditure into the components of Science Foundation Ireland, the Health Research Board, the National Cancer Registry, the hospital payment enquiry scheme system and its successor and all other recipients combined; and the overall expenditure in terms of finance between the largest ten institutions or beneficiaries in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26674/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department supports health research primarily through the Health Research Board (HRB). The HRB is a statutory body under the aegis of my Department and is the lead agency in Ireland supporting and funding health research. For 2017 the HRB's funding from my Department is €42.054 million.

The HRB has provided details on its spending on research awards for the period 2007 to 2017. This information setting out overall annual total expenditure and a breakdown of the top ten beneficiaries for each year, except for 2017 which only covers the period from January to May, is set out in tabular form below:

2007	€	2008	€
Total Health Award Payments	40,416,328	Total Health Award Payments	43,281,118
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	7,331,132	TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	9,992,971
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	5,794,109	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	7,520,123
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	5,399,467	ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	5,242,720
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	5,031,067	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	5,134,340
NUI GALWAY	3,808,019	NUI GALWAY	3,207,512

Questions - Written Answers

ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL	1,766,394	MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	1,588,119
DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	1,136,403	ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL	1,561,175
BEAUMONT HOSPITAL	1,029,116	BEAUMONT HOSPITAL	894,697
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HOSPITAL GALWAY	1,019,692	MATER MISERICORDIAE HOSPITAL	879,825
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	1,017,606	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HOSPITAL GALWAY	857,756
2009		2010	
Total Health Award Payments	40,126,940	Total Health Award Payments	37,534,829
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	10,253,037	TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	9,027,563
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	6,116,916	ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	5,566,426
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	5,125,816	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	5,338,616
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	4,996,974	NUI GALWAY	4,272,677
NUI GALWAY	3,293,945	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	4,023,454
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	1,603,713	MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	1,676,317
MATER MISERICORDIAE HOSPITAL	1,486,271	DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	989,250
BEAUMONT HOSPITAL	1,053,667	MATER MISERICORDIAE HOSPITAL	875,776
ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL	1,048,873	IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	759,349
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HOSPITAL GALWAY	893,312	BEAUMONT HOSPITAL	588,149
2011		2012	
Total Health Award Payments	32,581,716	Total Health Award Payments	33,205,244
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	6,744,555	TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	7,400,266
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	5,820,594	ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	5,203,800
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	5,219,973	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	4,726,462
NUI GALWAY	3,636,726	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	4,007,254
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	2,133,477	NUI GALWAY	3,707,955

MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	1,439,309	IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	2,082,000
ST VINCENT'S UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL	1,248,862	MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	1,475,762
IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	803,653	DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	923,078
ST JAMES'S HOSPITAL	621,106	NATIONAL CANCER REGISTRY	581,445
OUR LADY'S CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL CRUMLIN	558,114	UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	530,678
2013		2014	
Total Health Award Payments	35,930,708	Total Health Award Payments	38,242,121
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	8,452,618	NUI GALWAY	13,108,905
NUI GALWAY	7,276,886	TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	6,985,105
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	5,588,585	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	4,158,880
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	4,051,912	ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	3,854,761
IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	3,748,000	IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	3,748,000
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	3,584,829	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	2,655,846
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	993,088	UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	601,092
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	716,193	DUBLIN DENTAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL	421,874
OUR LADY'S HOSPICE AND CARE SERVICES	353,919	MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	409,822
DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	349,205	OUR LADY'S HOSPICE AND CARE SERVICES	353,919
2015		2016	
Total Health Award Payments	35,731,721	Total Health Award Payments	35,940,798
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	6,939,112	TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	8,409,616
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	6,051,408	ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	7,180,020
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	5,566,707	NUI GALWAY	5,199,377
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	4,395,612	IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	3,201,011

Questions - Written Answers

NUI GALWAY	4,173,034	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	2,972,889
IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	3,808,000	UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	2,878,704
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	728,809	UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	1,258,882
MOLECULAR MEDICINE IRELAND	558,000	MOLECULAR MEDICINE IRELAND	785,000
DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	519,915	DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY	710,324
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	490,571	MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY	702,120
2017 - January to May			
Total Health Award Payments	12,423,345		
IRISH CLINICAL ONCOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP	2,998,400		
TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	2,649,448		
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN	1,755,375		
NUI GALWAY	1,105,724		
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK	1,099,389		
MOLECULAR MEDICINE IRELAND	750,000		
ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND	559,828		
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK	265,672		
ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE	228,959		
DUBLIN DENTAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL	117,393		

The National Cancer Registry is a public body, established in 1991, to collect and classify information on all cancer cases which occur in Ireland. So far this year (Jan-May 2017) it has received a total of €1.020m funding from my Department. Additionally set out below in tabular form is the funding the National Cancer Registry received from my Department over the past ten years.

Year	-
2007	€2.115
2008	€3.037
2009	€2.477
2010	€2.367
2011	€2.530
2012	€2.475
2013	€2.444

2014	€2.498
2015	€2.440
2016	€2.614

The funding of Science Foundation Ireland is a matter for my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise and Innovation.

Health research projects in Ireland can also take place in many other fora including universities and hospitals. Information on these research projects and their expenditure levels would not be routinely collected by my Department.

Finally, the Deputy also enquires about the “hospital payment enquiry scheme system”. I understand that the Deputy may be referring to the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) scheme. HIPE, which is operated by the Healthcare Pricing Office in the HSE, is a health information system designed to collect demographic, clinical and administrative information on discharges and deaths from public acute hospitals nationally. HIPE is the only source of morbidity statistics available nationally for public acute hospital services in Ireland. All acute public hospitals participating in HIPE report over 1.5 million discharges annually. HIPE information is used by the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive in the planning, provision and measurement of acute hospital services. In addition, HIPE data in aggregated form, thus ensuring patient confidentiality, can be used by researchers in conducting health research.

Services for People with Disabilities

1045. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the options open to the parents of a child (details supplied) under six years of age who needs behavioural intervention. [26675/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Supply

1046. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make Entresto (details supplied) available to persons here; if so, the date it will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26679/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE has completed its review of Entresto for the treatment of symptomatic chronic heart failure in adult patients.

Under the 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, in a situation where the HSE wishes to reimburse a medicine but cannot do so from within existing resources, it may inform my Department of its decision in this respect. The Minister for Health, may as he deems appropriate, bring a Memorandum to Government in relation to the funding implications and requesting consideration of same.

The HSE has advised my Department that Entresto cannot be funded from within existing resources. This matter is currently under consideration by my Department.

It should be noted that the final decision on the reimbursement of medicines remains the statutory responsibility of the HSE.

Medical Products Supply

1047. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a hearing aid test and hearing aid replacement for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26680/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1048. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the status of hospital admission for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26685/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1049. **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. [26696/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

General Practitioner Services Provision

1050. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate and ensure that persons (details supplied) in the Drimnagh area with a medical general practitioner cards will not lose their general practitioner service due to the closure of a general practice. [26698/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1051. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay regarding an appointment for a person (details supplied) with a consultant in Sligo University Hospital. [26703/17]

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

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

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

Health Services Provision

1052. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to deal with a case in which a HSE transport service provider has been left unpaid (details supplied). [26704/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Procedures

1053. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the number of hip operations carried out in Letterkenny University Hospital to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number of these operations carried out in each of the years 2014 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26717/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1054. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a hip operation in Letterkenny university hospital; the current waiting time for this operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26719/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1055. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when the new cataract unit in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital will be open; and when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment. [26722/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

1056. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Health the mental health services available for young persons in County Wexford under 18 years of age; his plans to increase same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26723/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres

1057. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the parking facilities at a location (details supplied) which results in cars being parked in a dangerous manner; if a portion of the HSE owned land to the rear of this facility can be converted into car parking facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26738/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care facilities, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Executive for direct reply.

Blood Donations

1058. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the current one year deferral on MSM blood donors here to a three month deferral (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26740/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On January 16th this year, the IBTS lifted its lifelong ban on men who have sex with men (MSM) from donating blood.

The policies introduced by the IBTS in January set out that (a) the deferral policy for men

who have sex with men (MSM) from donating blood should be reduced to a period of one year following their last sexual encounter with a man and (b) all donors who have had a sexually transmitted infection (STI) should be deferred from donating blood for a period of at least five years from that infection.

The IBTS has no current plans to reduce the one year deferral on MSM from donating blood, though they will continue to keep all deferral policies under active review in light of scientific evidence, emerging infections and international experience.

Health Services Provision

1059. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with representatives of a group (details supplied) to discuss the appointment of a new expert medical oncologist with sarcoma specific experience equal to or greater than the expert that previously treated patients at St Vincent's University Hospital. [26741/17]

1087. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE plans to hire a new expert medical oncologist with sarcoma specific experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26811/17]

1269. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to meet with an organisation (details supplied); if so, when; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27680/17]

1270. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the status of the recruitment process further to the commitment he gave in 2016 regarding the appointment of a medical oncologist with sarcoma specific experience equal to or greater than the expert that treated persons at St Vincent's University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27681/17]

1569. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with representatives of a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28964/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1059, 1087, 1269, 1270 and 1569 together.

I met with members of the Sarcoma Action Group last year, as well as with representatives from the HSE's National Cancer Control Programme and St Vincent's University Hospital, and engaged in discussions in relation to the provision of sarcoma services in Ireland, and in particular the service delivered at St Vincent's.

St Vincent's University Hospital has provided highly specialised and individualised treatment to sarcoma sufferers for a number of years.

Following the meeting last year, the recruitment of an additional post of consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma, based in St. Vincent's University Hospital, was prioritised to facilitate further development of the service there. St Vincent's University Hospital is responsible for the recruitment process. The Department has been advised that, following interviews for the post, a successful candidate has been identified and an appointment will be made in due course. In the interim, patients requiring treatment for sarcoma cancer will continue to receive high quality care at St Vincent's Hospital with care being managed by one of the hospital's full-time oncologists.

Motorised Transport Grant Closure

1060. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the scheme to replace the motorised transport grant; when it is expected to be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26761/17]

1134. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health when the Heath (Transport Support) Bill will come before the Dáil Éireann in view of the fact that the mobility allowance scheme was closed to new applicants in 2013 which has resulted in considerable hardship for persons with mobility issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26989/17]

1207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the mobility allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27288/17]

1219. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the motorised transport scheme will be reintroduced; and the date on which it will be open to new applicants. [27399/17]

1481. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when he will introduce the new scheme to replace the motorised transport grant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28726/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1060, 1134, 1207, 1219 and 1481 together.

Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health and the Programme for a Partnership Government acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The next step is to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

HSE Properties

1061. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the lands owned

by the HSE adjoining Navan hospital which are lying vacant; and when he will develop the primary care centre in Navan. [26762/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Counselling Services Provision

1062. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the twice yearly average waiting times for HSE counselling services in County Wexford, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26767/17]

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.

Counselling Services Provision

1063. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to meet the growing demands for counselling services particularly in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26768/17]

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

Health Services Provision

1064. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (detail supplied) in County Louth who is of the view that they would benefit from inpatient treatment for anorexia nervosa; if the person will receive inpatient treatment; when they may be admitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26778/17]

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

Medicinal Products Supply

1065. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied); when the drug Tysabri will be made available to multiple sclerosis patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26785/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Tysabri is an authorised medicinal product. As the question of provision of this drug to individual patients is a matter for the HSE and the hospital concerned, I have referred this query to the HSE and asked them to respond to you directly.

Medical Card Applications

1066. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [26787/17]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

1067. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have been assessed and are waiting for home help services in each of the nine community health organisations; the number of these persons currently in hospital awaiting discharge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26788/17]

1068. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have been assessed and are waiting for home care packages in each of the nine community health organisations; the number of these persons currently in hospital awaiting discharge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26789/17]

1069. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have been assessed and are waiting for intensive home care packages in each of the nine community health organisations; the number of these persons currently in hospital awaiting discharge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26790/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1067 to 1069, inclusive, together.

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

Home Help Service Data

1070. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the expected expenditure in 2017 for home help services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26791/17]

1071. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the expected expenditure in 2017 for home care packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26792/17]

1072. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the expected expenditure in 2017 for intensive home care packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26793/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1070 to 1072, inclusive, together.

I am pleased to say that overall funding for services for older people has increased to €765 million in 2017. This includes €367m for the direct funding of Home Help and Home Care Packages. A further €9m supported by HSE and Atlantic Philanthropies will provide Intensive

Home Care Packages for people with more complex needs.

The HSE's National Service Plan for 2017 provides for a target of

- 10.57 million Home Help Hours
- 16,750 Home Care Packages,
- 190 Intensive Home Care Packages for clients.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

1073. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he will ensure that the National Treatment Purchase Fund avoids double paying public hospitals for work they should be doing using their HSE funding when purchasing treatment for persons on waiting lists under the insourcing initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26795/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List Action Plan has been developed by the HSE, in conjunction with the NTPF, and focuses on reducing the number of patients who will be waiting 15 months or more for inpatient / daycase treatment by the end of October 2017. Under this Plan, since early February, over 14,200 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List. The IPDC Waiting List Action Plan will be delivered through a combination of normal hospital NSP-funded activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising the €15m of Budget 2017.

A robust monitoring framework for the implementation of this Plan has been established. One of the aims of this reporting mechanism is to ensure that the NTPF principles and criteria for insourcing are adhered to, and, in particular, that any work funded through insourcing is additional to work funded through the National Service Plan and that the amount charged for procedures only reflects the additional costs incurred in providing the treatment.

A number of specific measures are being put in place to ensure that additional activity is being delivered under the Plan, these include the implementation of Service Level Agreements between the NTPF and individual public hospitals to support the treatment and management of patients. The HSE and the NTPF will monitor and oversee these Service Level Agreements to ensure appropriate escalation steps are taken as required if the SLAs are not adhered to. Adherence to the SLAs will ensure the application of NTPF principles and criteria for insourcing,

The HSE will also monitor Inpatient and Daycase normal elective work volumes by Hospital and focus on the reduction of longest waiters and ensure activity volumes remain in line with those agreed through the National Service Plan and the HSE inpatient/daycase Waiting List Action Plan.

Hospital Appointments Status

1074. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** 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. [26797/17]

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 be-

half, 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.

Medical Conditions

1075. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 962 of 2 May 2017, if he will request the HSE to circulate the international consensus primer for medical practitioners to all general practitioners to assist in the diagnosis of ME; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26798/17]

1076. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 962 of 2 May 2017, the reason the HSE has removed the section of their website on ME; if he will request the HSE to engage with a group (details supplied) to ensure the information that will be published is accurate and of use to those suffering with ME; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26799/17]

1077. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to parliamentary question number 962 of 2 May 2017, if he will request the HSE to investigate the use and effectiveness of the drugs ampligen, rituximab and suramin to treat cohorts of persons with ME in other jurisdictions; if he will consider their use here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26800/17]

1078. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 962 of 2 May 2017, if his attention has been drawn to the practices at a clinic (details supplied) in Sweden; if the HSE will examine the potential use of this multi disciplinary approach to diagnose and treat ME here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26801/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1075 to 1078, inclusive, together.

As these questions relate to the clinical diagnosis and management of ME as well as service issues, they are being referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Data

1079. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 18 years of age that were admitted to adult mental health services in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26803/17]

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 Data

1080. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons aged 18 to 25 years of age that were treated in adult mental health facilities in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26804/17]

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.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

1081. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the recruitment of specialist nurses for the new children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26805/17]

1082. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the staffing requirements for the new children's hospital; the number required for each grade and of directly employed staff, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26806/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1081 and 1082 together.

In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Graduate Statistics

1083. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of recent graduates from the four and half year degree programme run by UCC in paediatric and general nursing that are working here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26807/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Nursing Staff Data

1084. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost per nurse of recruiting each additional nurse from overseas; the cost of travel for health service officials time spent working here with pay while awaiting or participating in adaptation programmes; the cost of these programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26808/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Services

1085. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to HSE plans for a day hospital in Swords, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26809/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as

this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Building Programme

1086. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE or his Department have identified lands for the construction of a day hospital in Swords, County Dublin; the location and cost of purchase of such lands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26810/17]

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.

Question No. 1087 answered with Question No. 1059.

Hospital Appointments Status

1088. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the wait time for a person (details supplied) who has been referred to St Columcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown to see an endocrinologist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26817/17]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

1089. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the length of time to process fair deal nursing home support scheme applications once all paperwork is in order; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26820/17]

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 Administration

1090. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if there is a hardship fund available for persons that apply for the fair deal nursing home support scheme while the application is being processed and may have to avail of the services of a nursing home while a decision is being made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26821/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing

Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The Scheme covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of everyday living;
- Laundry service

The Scheme has a budget of €940 million in 2017, providing support to just over 23,600 people by the end of the year. In order to manage the available funds within the budget throughout the year, a national placement list is operated by the HSE. Funding approvals issue to applicants in chronological order. There is no hardship fund available for applicants whose NHSS application is being processed, however in 2017 the time applicants to the Scheme spend on the placement list for funding should not exceed 4 weeks.

Home Help Service Provision

1091. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for home help hours in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26823/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

1092. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of child and adolescent mental health service beds that are being provided for children under 18 years of age in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26824/17]

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.

Home Care Packages

1093. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with dementia availing of intensive home care packages in 2017 by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26825/17]

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.

Disability Services Funding

1094. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the reason the recent request for additional funding for a group (details supplied) which would provide key services not delivered by the HSE has been ignored; when a decision will issue on this additional funding application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26830/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1095. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times at the breast cancer clinic at Letterkenny University Hospital specifically in respect of those waiting for three months, six months, nine months, 12 months, 15 months and all periods in similar increments thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26834/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The following table sets out the number of patients waiting to be seen at the symptomatic breast clinic in Letterkenny University Hospital (LUH) - these figures include patients who have been assigned clinic dates:

Symptomatic Breast Clinic Waiting Times - LUH	
Waiting Time	No. of Patients
0-3 months	205
3-6 months	139
6-12 months	245
12+ months	143

The symptomatic breast disease clinic at LUH operates as a satellite service of University Hospital Galway (UHG). The service at LUH is run by a single consultant who also undertakes general surgery at the hospital. This service is augmented by locum consultants and by Galway-based Saolta consultants who travel to carry out clinics in Letterkenny.

A locum consultant surgeon, to deal with the current demands on the service, has been identified and is expected to commence work towards the end of July. Increased levels of support from Saolta consultants is also envisaged with additional clinics being scheduled. Consideration is also being given to longer-term measures to meet future requirements of this service.

Home Care Packages Provision

1096. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the home care package or a similar benefit is available to a person (details supplied) living with a serious disability at home

and who requires a substantial amount of care throughout the day. [26835/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1097. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in Croom Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26837/17]

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

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

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

Question No. 1098 answered with Question No. 1008.

Medical Card Administration

1099. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to simplify the application for medical general practitioner card for persons with long-term illnesses by awarding automatically medical cards for certain conditions. [26863/17]

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 Deputy may be aware of the key recommendation of the "Keane" Report of the Expert Panel on Medical Need for Medical Card Eligibility that a person's means should remain the main qualifier for a medical card. It also recommended that it is neither feasible nor desirable to list conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. Therefore, medical card provision is solely based on financial assessment. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

However, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to sup-

port applicants in applying for a medical card and where appropriate exercise discretion. In particular, the HSE may, in exercising its discretion, take full account of the difficult circumstances, financial, social and medical, in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines and even though an applicant exceeds the income threshold grant a medical card on a discretionary basis.

In addition, the HSE has a system in place for the provision of medical cards in response to an emergency situation for persons with a serious medical condition in need of urgent or on-going medical care that they cannot afford and persons in palliative care, who are terminally ill. With the exception of terminally ill patients, all medical cards, granted on an emergency basis, are issued on the basis that the patient is eligible for a medical card on the basis of means or undue hardship, and will follow up with a full application within a number of weeks of receiving the medical card eligibility. These cards are issued within 24 hours of receipt of the required patient details and a letter which confirms the medical condition from a doctor or consultant.

Orthodontic Services Provision

1100. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for orthodontic treatment. [26865/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

1101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 494 of 30 May 2017, if he will meet with the group personally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26868/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I met with representatives from St. Joseph's Association Parents and Friends on 26th April last and I will be meeting with the group again on 29th June when I visit St. Ita's, Portrane.

I trust this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Hospital Services

1102. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding to the planned extra capacity for scoliosis surgery at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; the position on the appointment of an extra surgeon; the current waiting list for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26878/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Abuse in Hospitals

1103. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 414 of 23 May 2017, if he or a representative will meet with a person (details supplied)

[26881/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This issue has been previously raised in a similar PQ earlier this year by the Deputy. The individual was advised of the response received by the HSE in relation to her specific case and was also advised that if she considered a criminal offence was committed against her while she was a patient, then it was open to her to make a complaint to An Garda Síochána for investigation. I understand that she has since been in touch with them. As Minister I am always happy to meet with individuals, but in this instance it may be more appropriate for contacts to continue with the HSE and the Gardaí.

Obesity Strategy

1104. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on a recent World Health Organization survey which predicts that Ireland will become Europe's most obese country by 2030; and the measures he plans to introduce to deal with this issue. [26882/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): A Healthy Weight for Ireland - The National Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP) is one of the key developments arising from Healthy Ireland, the framework for improving health and well-being across the population. The policy acknowledges that obesity represents one of the biggest public health challenges that Ireland faces.

The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy.

I wish to emphasise that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this.

The OPAP firstly prescribes 'Ten Steps Forward' to deal with obesity. The appointment of a National Clinical Lead for Obesity in the HSE is among the priority actions recommended. The National Clinical Lead will be responsible for developing models of care for the prevention and management of obesity in primary care and specialist services.

The OPAP includes a number of other priority actions including:

- implementing a 'whole of school' approach to healthy lifestyle programmes which includes nutrition, physical activity and exercise, smoking, alcohol and mental well-being;
- agreeing food reformulation targets with the food industry;
- developing a code of practice for food and drinks promotion, marketing, sponsorship and product placement;
- developing a communications strategy to increase knowledge among the public of being a healthy weight and to stimulate health behaviour change;
- developing proposals for a National Nutrition Policy and Action Plan;
- developing legislation for calorie posting to support people in making healthy choices;
- implementing the National Physical Activity Plan;
- developing proposals on evidence-based fiscal measures such as a levy on sugar-sweetened drinks;

- developing research in the area.

I am pleased to advise the deputy that the process for the appointment of a National Clinical Lead for Obesity is well underway. Furthermore, the Healthy Eating / Food Pyramid Guidelines have been revised and updated by a multi-stakeholder Working Group led by my Department. These were launched in December 2016 as the Healthy Food for Life initiative. A Food Reformulation Working Group is being established to reduce the sugar, fat and salt content of foods and beverages, in line with the EU Food Reformulation Project.

The development of legislation on calorie posting is also underway.

A Working Group has been established to develop a voluntary Code of Practice on Food Advertising, Promotion and Marketing including retail product placement and sponsorship. My Department has also worked with the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) on the marketing of food and drink to children; this arises in the context of the revised Children's Code to restrict marketing of high fat, high salt and high sugar foods and drinks. My Department will make a submission to the BAI in 2017 on the new code.

Health Promotion

1105. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether there is currently enough focus on health and well-being education among young persons. [26883/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Education about health and well-being for young persons currently exists through many avenues such as through the development and implementation of the Healthy Ireland Framework, the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures national policy framework for children and young people, the national physical activity plan, the obesity policy and action plan, and the national healthy eating guidelines. Appropriate legislative frameworks have also been developed for the prohibition of smoking in cars and for plain packaging of tobacco products, both of these initiatives highlight the dangers of tobacco use to young persons.

Cross sectorial work is ongoing with other government departments and agencies including Local Community Development Communities and Children and Young people's Services Committees to ensure appropriate alignment of services at local level.

In addition, the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) provide support for health promotion in school settings, including partnering with the Department of Education and Skills in implementing the Health Promoting Schools and Active School Flag initiatives, as well as through the development of resources for school settings and through the provision of training supports in partnership with the Professional Development Service for Teachers.

The Department of Health and the HSE are also working in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the introduction of Well-being as an area of learning in the Junior Cycle from September 2017.

Health and well-being promotional campaigns are run regularly by the HSE, who also provide funding to agencies such as Safefood and the Irish Heart Foundation to assist in the promotion of education about health and well-being for young persons.

General Practitioner Services

1106. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the position with regard to the provision of emergency equipment and supplies to rural general practitioners who are not members of a co-operative and are acting as surrogates for the ambulance service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26887/17]

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

Ambulance Service

1107. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the ambulance crisis in south Connemara, County Galway, in which the ambulance base in Carraroe is frequently unstaffed and unmanned with resulting unacceptable waiting times for an ambulance and in the view of general practitioners on the ground will result in death; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26888/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I met with a representative group from Connemara on 20 February last to hear their concerns regarding ambulance response times in Connemara. The Deputy can be assured that I am committed to the provision of a safe, patient focused pre-hospital emergency care service. The *Programme for Partnership Government* commits to additional annual investment in terms of ambulance personnel and vehicles. €7.2m additional funding was provided to the NAS in 2016, including €2m development funding. An additional €3.6m has been provided in 2017, which includes €1m to fund new developments.

With regards to the issue raised about the services in Connemara I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Contracts

1108. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if the general practitioners contractual review process has commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26891/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The Programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

Since 2015, negotiations have resulted in a number of service developments including the provision of free GP care to under 6's and over 70's, the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of Care for adult GMS patients with Type 2 Diabetes and enhanced supports for rural GPs. The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is under way and engagement with GP representative bodies began in January. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time. While I am of course anxious to see good progress made, it is not my intention to set a deadline for completion of discussions. I look forward to positive and constructive engagements with GP representatives in the months ahead.

Hospital Appointments Administration

1109. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26892/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

1110. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 430 of 21 February 2017, when a reply will issue from the HSE in view of the fact that no reply has issued to date (details supplied). [26894/17]

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.

Brexit Negotiations

1111. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26905/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on *Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union*. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last. Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access

to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these. The Department of Health and its agencies have been conducting detailed analysis on the impacts of Brexit in the area of health. A number of issues are being examined and contingency planning for a range of eventualities is underway. A key issue will be to ensure that there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a cross-border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis. The health sector has a highly mobile workforce and free movement issues and the mutual recognition and assurance of professional qualifications are being considered. On regulatory issues, it is clear that having a single set of rules across the European Union is enormously helpful – to protect human health, to ensure consumer protection and to provide a level playing field for industry. The UK no longer being part of a harmonised regulatory system in relation to food safety standards, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cosmetics could necessitate increased certification requirements or disrupt trade between Ireland and the UK. Ensuring continuity in the supply of medicines and medical devices following the UK's departure from the EU is a priority. The issue of customs is of relevance as it relates to additional food safety controls and medicines. The implications of Brexit for networks and organisations such as the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, European Reference Networks on rare diseases, or the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control are also under consideration.

These issues are currently being examined by the Department and its agencies and this work will continue over the period ahead. The key priorities for my Department are to ensure continuity in the provision of health services and to avoid, or mitigate against, changes to the current situation that would have a negative impact on human health.

Departmental Data

1112. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 240 of 3 May 2017, if the files in question been retrieved; if not, the reason for the delay in their retrieval; when he expects the examination of the file to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26919/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I can confirm that files have been retrieved from off-site storage and are being examined. I will revert to the Deputy in the coming weeks.

Hospital Appointments Status

1113. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); if the appointment can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26920/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and

the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

1114. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of supports for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26925/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1115. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to reduce the waiting lists for paediatric spinal surgery in Crumlin children's hospital; the number of children awaiting spinal surgery; the length of time they are waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26926/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1116. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of a surgery appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26927/17]

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

1117. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied) at the Mater hospital, Dublin [26937/17]

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.

Question No. 1118 answered with Question No. 1002.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1119. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be provided a date for surgery in Cappagh hospital. [26951/17]

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

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

Health Services Funding

1120. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether funding being provided to a hospice (details supplied) in County Cork is not meeting service demands and does not allow for the expansion of services in the future despite previous commitments to do so; and the detail of its allocation of funding compared to other hospices with similar services. [26952/17]

1121. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocation to a hospice (details supplied) in County Cork in each of the years from 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of staff employed in each of these years; the number of persons that have received treatment in this hospice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26953/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1120 and 1121 together.

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

Hospice Services Provision

1122. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if it is his policy to have an occupational therapist in every hospice; the number of hospices that employ a full time occupational therapist and or a part time occupational therapist; the number of hospices that do not employ an occupational therapist; his plans to provide for an occupational therapist in every

hospice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26954/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Department of Health policy on the development and provision of specialist palliative care services is contained in the 2001 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care (DoH). This document sets out the staffing ratios required for specialist inpatient units (hospices) and specialist palliative care services in the community (homecare). In hospices the ratios are determined by the number of beds and in the community by population.

Occupational Therapy is one of the disciplines that work as part of specialist palliative care multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs). With regard to specialist inpatient units, the Report recommends a ratio of one occupational therapist (OT) for every 10 beds. The HSE considers this to be a high level of staffing of one discipline in consideration of the overall needs of an MDT. However, the OT skill mix is being fully maintained for the planned new hospices currently in development.

There are eight hospices providing specialist inpatient beds in Ireland. The HSE's *Palliative Care Services Three Year Development Framework (2017-2019)*, due to be published this summer, indicates that of the six voluntary hospices, four have either full- or part-time OTs and two do not. Of the two HSE run services one has an Occupational Therapist and the second does not.

The Palliative Care Development Framework undertook an examination of staffing levels in all existing services and whereas it found gaps in some health care disciplines it also found higher levels of staffing in some areas. One of the recommendations in the Framework is to review these and to work with services to reconfigure where possible and/or to identify the need through the budget process for additional staff to strengthen multi-disciplinary skill mix configuration. This will include the provision of occupational therapy.

The Department of Health has welcomed the Framework as a good basis for the development of palliative care services, though the implementation of the framework will be subject to the overall budgetary process and the configuration and availability of resources.

Health Services Staff

1123. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a hospice (details supplied) in County Cork does not employ an occupational therapist on a full time or part time basis; his views regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26955/17]

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.

Service Level Agreements

1124. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that section 39 hospitals are not in a position to pay moneys owed to their staff under the public service pay agreement; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this is causing great anguish to the staff; if he has met with the HSE or written to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26956/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees and therefore, the HSE has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff. It should also be made clear that as the staff of these Section 39 organisations are not public servants, they were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions or the provisions of the subsequent Public Service Agreements which provided for pay restoration.

It is a matter for Section 39 organisations to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of their employment relationship and within the overall funding available for the delivery of agreed services.

Palliative Care Services

1125. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the commitment in the programme for Government on improving information and awareness of end of life services particularly those which provide persons with palliative care in the location of their choice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26957/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Minister, the Department of Health and the HSE are committed to ensuring that information and awareness of palliative care/end of life services is made widely available.

The HSE works in partnership with a wide range of voluntary organisations to provide this information on two levels. These organisations include the Irish Hospice Foundation, The All Ireland Institute for Hospice and Palliative Care, the Irish Cancer Society, LauraLynn and individual hospice services.

Firstly it is necessary to provide education and training to health care providers and professionals so that they can provide information, make timely and appropriate referrals to palliative care services and support individuals and families in their decision-making. Every person who avails of palliative care services will have previously come into contact with or been cared for by some other part of the health service. Therefore it is imperative that health care professionals are well-informed and able to provide expert advice to colleagues, patients and carers. Education, academic qualifications, study days etc. are currently being provided by a number of organisations / services across the country.

Two such initiatives being supported by the HSE are facilitated by the All Ireland Institute for Hospice and Palliative Care (AIHPC). One is the provision of an on-line Palliative Care Hub which has separate information / learning platforms for healthcare professionals and for patients and their carers (<http://aiihpc.org/palliative-hub/>). The second initiative is Project ECHO which is a demonstration project supporting 22 nursing homes in Dublin. The key aim is to empower nursing home staff to improve the experiences of residents and avoid unnecessary emergency department attendances or hospital admissions, ensuring that individuals who wish to die in their normal place of residence can do so. The HSE also provides funding for the Irish Hospice Foundation's Hospice Friendly Hospitals (HFH) programme which supports the establishment of Palliative / End of Life Care committees in acute hospitals. Initiatives associated with the HFH include improving communication skills, part of which is initiating difficult discussions about end of life care, improving hospital environments, education and training and improving bereavement care. The Irish Hospice Foundation also initiated the Think Ahead project which encourages people to discuss their wishes with their families and clinicians while

they are still well enough to do so.

The second element of information and awareness raising is for the general public, including patients and families. The HSE is supporting the public information / media campaign organised on an annual basis by the AIIHPC. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness of palliative care among the general public. It also provides links to further information as well as to organisations involved in palliative / end of life care.

Health Services Funding

1126. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he has met with officials from the HSE to discuss the way in which hospices are funded; if not, his plans to do so in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26958/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Minister and officials regularly meet with the HSE's National Lead for Palliative Care. The Department of Health has also engaged with the HSE in the development of the HSE's *Palliative Care Services Three Year Development Framework (2017-2019)* which will be published during the summer. The Framework details the development of seven new hospices over the period 2017 - 2021. The first one of these will open in Kerry at the end of this year. Kerry Hospice Foundation has agreed to provide 12.5% of the revenue requirement for the first five years, and after this period core services (pay and non-pay) will be 100% funded through the HSE.

The revenue for each new hospice will be agreed in the year prior to opening so as to include the requirement in the Estimates process. It is planned to cover core costs for each service. The ongoing contribution of local hospice fundraising groups is very much acknowledged and in many instances the groups have agreed to provide funding for ancillary services such as complementary therapies, art, volunteer co-ordinators, social activities and events, etc. They may also provide funding for specialised furniture or pieces of equipment.

The Framework recognises that existing specialist palliative care services are reliant to varying degrees on voluntary fundraising to subsidise core services. One of the Framework recommendations is the establishment of a short-life working group which will have the single aim of defining what constitutes core costs for all specialist palliative care services. This is with a view to ensuring that existing services will have these costs met on a phased basis through the Estimates / service planning processes. The working group is due to be established by the autumn.

The Department of Health has welcomed the Framework as a good basis for the development of palliative care services, though the implementation of the framework will be subject to the overall budgetary process and the configuration and availability of resources.

Palliative Care Services Provision

1127. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether his Department's staff patient ratio policy in relation to end of life care in a hospice setting is adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26959/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): Government policy on the development and provision of specialist palliative care services is set out in the 2001 Report of the National Advisory Committee on Palliative Care. This document describes the staffing ratios required for specialist inpatient units (hospices) and specialist palliative care

services in the community (homecare). In hospices the ratios are determined by the number of beds and in the community by population.

All hospices planned for development include provision for the multi-disciplinary teams described by the Report. The Report recommends one nurse and 0.5 health care attendees per bed and these will be put in place along with additional nursing managers. With regard to Allied Health Professionals, the recommendation is for one of each of the following disciplines for every 10 beds: Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Social Worker, Chaplain. The Report also recommends one session per week for Dietetics and Speech and Language Therapy. In the context of current staffing requirements this ratio is considered to be high for some disciplines while low for others. However, the skill mix is being fully maintained and for example the 15-bedded Kerry Hospice which is due to open in the autumn will have one Senior Occupational Therapist, one Senior Physiotherapist, 1.2 Senior Social Workers, 0.75 Chaplain, 0.6 Senior Pharmacist, 0.5 Dietician and 0.5 Speech and Language Therapist.

In the coming months I understand the HSE will publish a *Palliative Care Services Three Year Development Framework (2017 - 2019)* which undertook an examination of staffing levels in all existing services. Whereas it found gaps in some health disciplines it also found higher levels of staffing in some areas. One of the recommendations in the Framework is to review these and to work with services to reconfigure where possible and/or to identify the need through the budget process for additional staff to strengthen multi-disciplinary skill mix.

Hospice Services Provision

1128. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a hospice (details supplied) in County Cork will be allocated the €300,000 it will cost to address the pay restoration commitment made by the Government in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26960/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees and therefore, the HSE has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff. It should also be made clear that as the staff of these Section 39 organisations are not public servants, they were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions or the provisions of the subsequent Public Service Agreements which provided for pay restoration.

It is a matter for Section 39 organisations to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of their employment relationship and within the overall funding available for the delivery of agreed services.

Home Help Service Provision

1129. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has plans to recruit additional home help carers in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26963/17]

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.

Public Sector Staff Data

1130. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26974/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked that the HSE respond to you directly on the aspect of the question that relates to them. In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the aegis of the Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Respite Care Services Provision

1131. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the urgent need of respite for children, young adults and ageing adults in the community in County Louth; if his attention has been further drawn to a proposal for providing care for 30 persons (details supplied); his views on this proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26981/17]

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 I understand from the Chief Officer CHO Area 8 in the Health Service Executive (HSE), the proposal submitted is currently being reviewed as part of the CHO8 Respite Provision Project. For that reason and because the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Properties

1132. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange to have a HSE premises (details supplied) redecorated. [26982/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care facilities, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Executive for direct reply.

Occupational Therapy

1133. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that currently there is only one occupational therapist for County Louth (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26987/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to service matters, I

have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

Question No. 1134 answered with Question No. 1060.

Legislative Process

1135. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is expected to be finalised in the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26993/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill has completed Second Stage in the Seanad and the intention is to recommence Committee Stage in the Seanad during this session of the Oireachtas.

Question No. 1136 answered with Question No. 1016.

Question No. 1137 answered with Question No. 1002.

Disability Services Provision

1138. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities who have been allocated a personal assistant to date; the number which have a personal assistant currently; and the length of the waiting list for persons with disabilities to achieve the funding necessary for a personal assistant in terms of numbers and time [26996/17]

1139. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health his plans to invest the necessary funding to provide the number of personal assistants who are necessary to meet demand; the number of persons with disabilities that receive the funding for personal assistants directly; and the number that receive it through a third party organisation. [26997/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1138 and 1139 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports to 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. The commitment is outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles, equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is committed to protecting the level of Personal Assistant services available to people with disabilities. In their National Service Plan for 2016, the HSE exceeded the expected activity level for Personal Assistant hours which was 1.3 million hours, by approximately 200,000 hours. This reflects the responsive nature of the service provided and takes account of assessed need over time, as individual needs change. I understand that in 2017, the HSE expects to deliver 1.4 million Personal Assistance hours, an increase of 100,000 hours, to 2,357 adults with a physical and/or sensory disability.

As the Deputy's questions relate to a detailed service matter, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for a more detailed direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

1140. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no centre for independent living in County Meath; and his plans to open such a centre in the future. [26999/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Centre for Independent Living is a private limited company and registered charity and therefore it is not within my remit as Minister to advise on this matter.

Question No. 1141 answered with Question No. 1016.

Health Services Staff Data

1142. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of organisations classified under section 39 that operate in line with the knowledge of the Health Service Executive; the number of staff employed by each organisation; and the difference in pay scales for each staff member in each organisation in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 [27001/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are 1,667 agencies currently being funded by the HSE under Section 39 through Grant Aid Agreements and Service Arrangements. Staff employed by Section 39 organisations are not HSE employees and, therefore, the HSE has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff. Accordingly, any arrangements offered by each service provider in relation to its employees terms and conditions, including rates of pay are a matter for these organisations. As such, the Executive would not retain the detailed information requested by the Deputy in relation to the pay scales for each member of staff in each of these organisations.

Medicinal Products Supply

1143. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the status of the pricing application for the drug Entresto (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27002/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE has completed its review of Entresto for the treatment of symptomatic chronic heart failure in adult patients.

Under the 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, in a situation where the HSE wishes to reimburse a medicine but cannot do so from within existing resources, it may inform my Department of its decision in this respect. The Minister for Health, may as he deems appropriate, bring a Memorandum to Government in relation to the funding implications and requesting consideration of same.

The HSE has advised my Department that Entresto cannot be funded from within existing resources. This matter is currently under consideration by my Department.

It should be noted that the final decision on the reimbursement of medicines remains the

statutory responsibility of the HSE.

Question No. 1144 answered with Question No. 1016.

Mental Health Services Provision

1145. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person in (details supplied) will be seen by CAMHS. [27016/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

1146. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the space and availability of residential care for persons in Dublin who are in need of full-time care due to their level of disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27018/17]

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.

Primary Medical Certificates Data

1147. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in receipt of a primary medical certificate in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county, in tabular form. [27025/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Data

1148. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that are allocated home care packages in County Meath; the number of this cohort that are still awaiting these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27031/17]

1149. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the number of carer hours allocated under the home care package scheme in County Meath in which persons are still awaiting these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27032/17]

1150. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of carer hours that have been allocated home care packages in County Meath in which persons are still awaiting these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27033/17]

1151. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the position in which County Meath ranks in terms of delivery of the home care package scheme compared to other counties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27034/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1148 to 1151, inclusive, together.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

1152. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have further medical treatment in University Hospital Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27048/17]

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.

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

Departmental Correspondence

1153. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE management in the Sligo area have formally written to national management to highlight the risk posed by a lack of resources for children's services in counties Sligo and Leitrim and that they do not have the capacity to deal with the demand; if he will provide a copy of this correspondence as was reported on a radio station (details supplied) on 1 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27052/17]

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 Funding

1154. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health his plans and the timeframe to address the lack of resources for CAMHS and children's health services in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27053/17]

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 Staff

1155. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health when a full time child psychiatrist will be provided to address the long waiting list of vulnerable children in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27054/17]

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 Data

1156. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting appointment and diagnosis under the remit of CAMHS in counties Sligo and Leitrim, south Donegal and west Cavan; the length of waiting time for each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27055/17]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

1157. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if the National Treatment Purchase Fund can be used to reduce the length of time vulnerable children are waiting to be seen and receive a diagnosis by CAMHS in the Sligo Leitrim, south Donegal and west Cavan areas; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27056/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Department of Health and the HSE are working hard, on a continuous basis, to improve the delivery of mental health services for children and the services have benefited from the significant additional investment in mental health in recent years. Additional funding in Budget 2017 has resulted in an overall provision of over €850 million for all HSE mental health services in 2017.

There are currently 67 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service teams, and three Paediatric Liaison Teams. Approximately 18,500 children will attend the CAMHS service this year.

There are difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist CAMHS staff, particularly Consultant Psychiatrists. Intensive recruitment efforts are on-going but there is currently a serious shortage of suitably qualified CAMHS Consultants both at national and European level. It should be noted however that despite increasing CAMHS demands overall and the staffing difficulties, 68% of children referred to CAMHS are seen within twelve weeks. Over the past two years, the waiting list for over 12 months has reduced (from 455 cases to 279 in March 2017). As Primary Care services are usually the first point of contact for children and adolescents when problems initially present, those with mild to moderate presentations are seen by psychologists in the service, unless there is a significant risk of harm, a rapid deterioration or a crisis which requires a specialist response. In order to develop early intervention services for those under age 18, €5 million has been allocated to include recruitment of 114 Assistant Psychologists in primary care. These posts have now been sanctioned for recruitment.

It is important to remember that despite increasing demands overall on CAMHS, individual cases professionally assessed as requiring urgent access to services do receive priority.

The HSE Service Plan 2017, as a priority, will further develop CAMHS, including better out-of- hours liaison and seven-day response services.

It is not envisaged that the Waiting List initiatives due to be implemented by the National Treatment Purchase Fund and the HSE under its Waiting List Action Plans, will include mental health services.

Health Services Provision

1158. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied). [27073/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Licensing

1159. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health when the cannabis access programme will be operational for multiple sclerosis patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27074/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): An Expert Reference Group, chaired by Dr Mairín Ryan, Director of Health Technology Assessment at the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) convened on 30 March to commence work on drafting guidelines, in line with National Standards for Clinical Practice Guidance Development, to facilitate the prescription and supply of medicinal cannabis to qualifying patients.

The work of the group is guided by the conclusions of the HPRA report and other international scientific evidence in developing operational guidelines for the implementation of the access programme through which the optimal use of cannabis for medicinal purposes in Ireland will be implemented.

The guidelines will focus on the clinical criteria for patient access; forms of medicinal cannabis that will be permitted for use; prescribing and dispensing requirements for doctors and pharmacists; education requirements for healthcare professionals and patients and ethical implications of such a scheme. A major focus of the Expert Group's work in drafting the guidelines for the safe use of cannabis for those patients who will be prescribed cannabis-based treatments through the Cannabis Access Programme has been on contribution to the contents of the guidelines by clinicians, patients and pharmacists, who will be the central stakeholders in this initiative.

The establishment of the access programme and the requisite legislative amendments under the Misuse of Drugs Acts will take a number of months to complete.

In the meantime, under existing legislation it remains open to me as Minister to consider granting a licence to an Irish-registered physician, under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, for access to medical cannabis for named patients, where the proposed course of treatment has been endorsed by the patient's consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient, and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Ultimately it is the decision of the clinician, in consultation with their patient, to prescribe or not prescribe a particular treatment for a patient under their care.

Hospital Admissions

1160. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of paediatric social admissions (details supplied) to Temple Street hospital in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [27088/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the HSE has now replied to the Deputy on this matter.

Hospitals Data

1161. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the waiting lists for post operation routine x-rays in Our Lady of Lourdes hospital, Drogheda in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27092/17]

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 Charges

1162. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding medical debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27097/17]

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

Medical Card Delays

1163. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [27099/17]

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

Medical Card Delays

1164. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [27100/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact

service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Delays

1165. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [27101/17]

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

Medical Card Delays

1166. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [27102/17]

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

Disability Act Employment Targets

1167. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27139/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In regard to the matter raised by the Deputy, Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies to:

- promote and support the employment of people with disabilities;
- comply with any statutory Code of Practice;
- meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities;
- report every year on achievement of these obligations.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) reports on compliance with the 3% target. In its

latest published report for the calendar year 2015, the NDA noted that in my Department, 3.3% of staff employed had disabilities.

My Department does not hold a recruitment licence and all of our new staff come from competitions run by the Public Appointments Service.

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) was launched by the Government on 2 October 2015.

The Government has already taken a number of key decisions as recommended in the Strategy:

- The public service employment target for people with disabilities will be increased on a phased basis as set out in the Strategy from 3% to 6%;

- special public service competitions for people with disabilities will be arranged and alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities will be opened up.

Under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, all public bodies are required to ensure that unless there is good reason to the contrary for not doing so, that not less than 3% of the persons employed by it are persons with disabilities. The Health Sector's Monitoring Committee is required under the Act, to draw up a report in writing in relation to compliance not later than 30 June in each year. The Monitoring Committee is currently completing this report with data supplied by the bodies under my Department's aegis and the report will be submitted to the National Disability Authority by the required deadline.

In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the remit of my Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

1168. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of additional inpatient modular hotel type beds for South Tipperary General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27150/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are capacity challenges at South Tipperary General Hospital (STGH) but work is currently underway to address the issue. Recognising that bed utilisation has increased significantly in the hospital in recent times, the South/South West Hospital Group is conducting a capacity review of the hospital and this is nearing completion. This review will inform the precise level and nature of any additional capacity required to meet current and future needs. The Department's National Capacity Review will also help identify service requirements and inform resourcing priorities. The Deputy may also wish to note that the Hospital Group intends to procure a Master Plan for the STGH campus which will provide for the orderly development of the campus and ensure that it is not compromised in any way.

One of the options currently under consideration is to provide additional surge capacity at the hospital through a temporary in-patient solution at the site. Any such solution would have to be in accordance with the new "National Framework for Alternative Accommodation at Hospital Sites". While no decisions have been made by the HSE in relation to the provision of temporary alternative accommodation in specific locations to date, any such decisions will be based on submissions made by hospitals and hospital groups as part of their budgetary processes, and will be in line with the procurement process set out in this National Framework. Consideration

of the needs of STGH will therefore be further considered by the HSE in the context of the 2018 Estimates submission.

In terms of providing additional support in the interim, and to alleviate pressure on the ED, the HSE has identified that the most immediate and effective response available is through the “fit out” of additional space for 11 trolley bays on the first floor of the hospital. Accordingly, this was prioritised for funding and has been completed recently. A recruitment process is underway for the additional staff required to operate the new area. It is anticipated that the additional space will open in September.

I should also add that the HSE is exploring what additional supports Our Lady’s Hospital, Cashel could provide to alleviate pressure in STGH, including in the ED.

Services for People with Disabilities

1169. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no consultation took place with family members of a person (details supplied); and if he will ensure that the family members are consulted in view of the difficulties which will arise in the new facility. [27155/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

1170. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if priority will be given to provide funding for a person (details supplied) to enable them transfer to a more suitable facility. [27156/17]

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

1171. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to make a location (details supplied) a seven day care facility with appropriate staffing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27157/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

1172. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the commencement date of the build project for the new satellite dialysis unit in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27158/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Home Help Service Provision

1173. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours will be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27159/17]

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.

Disease Management

1174. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if his officials will meet with representatives of a group (details supplied); if he is examining the way in which sufferers of Lyme disease can be supported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27169/17]

1177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27181/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1174 and 1177 together.

My colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for health protection, met with representatives from Tick Talk last summer, and listened to their experiences and the impact of this condition. Their stories showed the need for additional awareness of Lyme disease, both by the public and the health services.

Since 2013, the HPSC has held an annual ‘Lyme Awareness Week’ at the beginning of the tick biting season, the purpose of which is to draw attention - particularly in the media - to Lyme disease and the ticks that can spread this disease. This year Lyme Disease week took place between 18 - 22 May. It is normally held at this time of the year to raise awareness before people engage in outdoor activities such as ramblers, campers, mountain bikers, and others who work and walk in forested or grassy, which bring them into contact with ticks. Advice is given on how to avoid tick bites, and on what to do if you are bitten. Further information is available on the HPSC website - www.hpsc.ie and on twitter.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC has established a Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee, the aim of which is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, Occupational Health an Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency, an Environmental Health Officer and, very importantly, a representative from Tick Talk Ireland, the primary Support Group for Lyme disease in Ireland. The Sub-Committee first met on 6 May 2015 and it is expected to report in 2017.

Question No. 1175 answered with Question No. 1029.

Electronic Health Records

1176. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the individual health identifier and his further views on the fact that the volume of data collected on persons is excessive; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that personal information is being drawn from State sources without a person’s consent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27180/17]

1247. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the legality of the ongoing sharing of personal data between Departments as part of the establishment of the individual health identifier database in view of a judgment (details supplied). [27531/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1176 and 1247 together.

The Government approved and published a strategy in 2013 for developing eHealth capability in the Irish health system called the *eHealth strategy for Ireland, 2013*. This strategy sets out a number of objectives and a road map for the delivery and implementation of eHealth for the benefit of patients. One of the recommendations in the strategy was the development of a system of unique identifiers for patients to underpin patient safety and efficiency. A similar recommendation was made by the Health Information and Quality Authority and the Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance in 2008.

The Health Identifiers Act 2014 provides a basis, in primary legislation, for the development and deployment of health identifiers for individual patients and also for health services providers and health professionals. The initial phase of the health identifier implementation project is concerned with individual health identifiers (IHIs). Each patient is being assigned a unique identifier when they engage with the health system for the purposes of better patient care and safety both of which are of paramount importance. The 2014 Act includes express provisions for the efficient seeding of the National IHI Register from identified sources that are tied directly to establishing and maintaining the accuracy of the Register.

In that regard, section 8 of the Act provides that a Minister of the Government may, solely for the purpose of establishing, or maintaining the accuracy of, the National Register of Individual Health Identifiers, provide the Minister for Health with an individual's other identifying particulars and the Minister may use any such particulars so provided for that purpose. This explicit legislative basis for the sharing of specified data and the strict parameters on what data may be shared, and in what circumstances, distinguish section 8 critically from the circumstances of the Bara case where the data were transferred under an internal legal protocol, which was not a legislative measure, and was not the subject of an official publication like an Act of the Oireachtas.

The data held in the Register of Individual Health Identifiers, as specified in section 2 of the 2014 Act, is composed only of data to identify a patient using the (PSI) public service identify dataset and the health identifier number itself. Only demographic data is stored on the Register and, under the Act, it is expressly provided that no clinical information on an individual can be held as part of the IHI dataset. The individual elements of that dataset are those required for unique identification and like the rest of the Health Identifiers Act were the subject of engagement with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. Accordingly, I do not feel that the data being collected is excessive in view of the patient's safety aims of the legislation which are greatly enhanced and supported by unique identification. It is important to note that the IHI is only a number and is, of itself, not a medical record of any type. It is also important to point out that the roll out of a system of health identifiers for patients has no linkage with any eligibility for any type of health service or benefit. It is primarily a patient safety initiative and a fundamental building block for eHealth and ICT developments into the future.

As part of the work to establish the IHI Register, a privacy impact assessment (PIA) was conducted. A public consultation exercise was also undertaken as part of the preparation for the implementation of the IHI. There has also been engagement with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner in relation to the deployment of the IHI. It is most important to bear in mind that the Health Identifiers Act 2014 did not change in any way the law, including data protection law, in relation to the statutory rights of patients regarding their medical records or the obligations that data controllers have for protecting patients' personal health data.

Question No. 1177 answered with Question No. 1174.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1178. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider putting the new diabetes glucose monitoring system sensor on the long-term illness book. [27184/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1179. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to add the glucose reading sensor to the long-term illness book for persons with diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27198/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Insurance

1180. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a company (details supplied) is owned by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27199/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Voluntary Health Insurance Board is the only commercial State Body under the aegis of my Department, operating as a commercial entity in a competitive private health insurance market. As Minister, I do not have a role in the day-to-day operations of the company. I do, however, retain responsibility under the Voluntary Health Insurance Acts 1957-2008 to appoint, re-appoint and remove members of the Voluntary Health Insurance Board.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

1181. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if speech and language therapy will be provided to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry before they are due to begin national school in September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27202/17]

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

Vaccination Programme

1182. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if all patient information leaflets published by the HSE regarding the HPV vaccine gardasil contain all known side effects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27204/17]

1186. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the manufacturer product information leaflet for the human papillomavirus vaccine which lists certain adverse effects not listed on the HSE leaflet is being made available to parents and children before consent is being given for administration of the vaccine; and if not, the reason therefor. [27215/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1182 and 1186 together.

The HSE is committed to providing accurate information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and side effects to allow them to choose whether to give consent to vaccination. All the information provided to parents about vaccination is prepared from the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Products Characteristics (SPC) and Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). The information is presented in clear simple language and approved by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) so that it can be understood by all adults.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) Guide 'Communicating in plain English' (2015) developed in partnership with NALA states that "One in six people find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a health leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions. One in four has difficulties in real world maths from simple addition and subtraction to the calculation of averages". Therefore, like other countries providing school immunisation programmes, the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) is replaced by this information leaflet and like other countries the HSE information leaflet provides the same information

on side effects of the vaccine.

Prior to all school immunisation parents receive an information pack in a sealed package with an information leaflet, consent form and cover letter. The information packs for all immunisation are standardised nationally. The information booklets include information on all the known side effects that can occur after each vaccination. All the known side effects of the HPV vaccine Gardasil are outlined in the information booklet given to parents. Parents are also given contact details for their local immunisation office and advised to speak to a member of the school immunisation team if they have any further questions.

Parents are not being denied the information on the Patient Information Leaflet. The HSE parent information leaflet refers parents to the national immunisation website www.immunisation.ie where links to additional information including the licensing documentation, the SPC and the PIL for each vaccine can be found at: www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/schoolprog/HPV/HPV/.

The website allows members of the public to contact the National Immunisation Office (NIO) to ask a question if they require further information. These questions, when possible, are answered by the staff of the NIO within one working day. The NIO website has been accredited by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Vaccination Programme

1183. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if he will put in place an investigation into the use of the HPV vaccine gardasil and its impact on young girls and women that have received the vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27205/17]

1187. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if an investigatory body will be put in place to examine the cases of children that have displayed adverse effects after receiving the HPV vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27216/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1183 and 1187 together.

Immunisation is regarded as one of the safest and most cost-effective of health care interventions and the importance of vaccination is acknowledged by all the major international health organisations. The World Health Organisation estimates that up to 3 million lives are saved each year as a result of vaccination and the scientific evidence is clear that benefits of vaccines outweigh the known side effects.

The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice. All relevant and appropriate information is taken into account when deciding to make changes to the State's immunisation programmes.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines that are licensed in Ireland. While no medicine is entirely without risk, the safety of vaccines, as with all medicines, is carefully monitored and any new evidence concerning side-effects is taken into account. The HPRA and the European Medicines Agency continually monitor adverse events to vaccination.

A number of unsubstantiated claims have been made of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. It is important to reassure people that anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the causes of their symptoms. The diverse natures of these symptoms, which can have both physical and psychological causes, are shared by many conditions which have implications for both diagnostic and treatment services. The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services and the HSE is working to put in place clinical care pathways appropriate to their differing medical needs.

As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine cannot be held responsible for these illnesses. However, this misinformation relating to unsubstantiated claims has led to a significant drop in uptake rates of the HPV vaccine. This means that a large cohort of girls is now at risk of developing cervical cancer later in their lives.

This misinformation is causing real harm to those unvaccinated children and adults who develop vaccine preventable diseases, and to people who seek inappropriate treatments for real conditions that are not caused by vaccines. Any parent who has doubts or questions about vaccination should talk to their family doctor, or alternatively to visit the National Immunisation office website. These sources of information are clear and accurate and will answer any queries you may have about the benefits or risks of vaccination. Vaccination is the best way for parents to make sure their children are healthy and protected from preventable diseases.

I have no plans to set up an investigation along the lines suggested by the Deputies as the safety and efficacy of these vaccines continues to be monitored by regulatory agencies at both national and European level.

Hospital Appointments Status

1184. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be provided a date for an appointment at the trauma and orthopaedics clinic in Cappagh hospital. [27206/17]

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.

Emergency Services Personnel

1185. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to meet with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to discuss a memorandum of understanding between the Health Service Executive and local authorities in addition to the financial resources that would be required to implement these supports across the State in

respect of utilising the services of fire-fighters, employed full-time or on a part time retainer in their capacity as trained emergency first responders as a back up to the ambulance service. [27213/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the Fire Services National Oversight & Implementation Group, which consists of fire service management and staff representatives, is exploring whether it is possible to support the National Ambulance Service, through the utilisation of fire-fighters in their capacity as trained emergency first responders. Any proposal emerging from these discussions will be considered in the first instance by the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management, which comes under the remit of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

The HSE has also established an Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Steering Group to develop a strategy to improve out of hospital cardiac arrest outcomes in Ireland. The Steering Group comprises a range of Government departments, ambulance providers, professional bodies, patient groups and voluntary groups. Fire services are represented on this Steering Group and will be key to identify what role the fire services could play in improving cardiac arrest outcomes, alongside other providers.

I look forward to being kept apprised of the outcome of these discussions.

Question No. 1186 answered with Question No. 1182.

Question No. 1187 answered with Question No. 1183.

Question No. 1188 answered with Question No. 1019.

Health Services Provision

1189. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding cataract operations carried out in Munster (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27223/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1190. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); the timeline for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27224/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled 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.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

1191. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE plans to fill a vacant post (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27233/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

1192. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27236/17]

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.

Hospitals Data

1193. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of procedures carried out at the new endoscopy unit at Roscommon county hospital since it was established in June 2016 to date in 2017, by month, in tabular form; the average length of stay for a person; the number of staff currently employed at the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27239/17]

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.

Question No. 1194 answered with Question No. 1002.

National Children’s Hospital Expenditure

1195. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of the benchmarked post tender construction costs of the new children’s hospital against comparable con-

struction costs for major acute hospitals internationally; the name of the major acute hospitals that were used for the purposes of such comparisons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27245/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) is the statutory body charged with delivery of the capital project. The NPHDB benchmarked the post-tender construction costs of the new children's hospital against construction costs for major acute hospitals internationally. This exercise demonstrated that construction elements of the project compare favourably to the costs of international projects of a similar size and scale. I have asked the NPHDB to respond to you directly regarding the benchmarked post tender construction costs and the name of the major acute hospitals that were used for the purposes of comparisons.

National Children's Hospital

1196. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of the business case made with respect to the new national children's hospital project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27246/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Following completion of the tender evaluation process for the main hospital and satellite centres construction, the NPHDB updated the Final Project Brief and Definitive Business Case to incorporate the updated costs. The Final Project Brief builds on all of the work done for the project to date and is a concise description of the backdrop to, and strategic case for, the new children's hospital and satellite centres programme, setting out its scope both in terms of the physical investment in buildings, equipment and ICT and with regard to how the new hospital and satellite centres will operate. It also sets out the project objectives and benefits, and provides an overview of other technical, administrative and financial information. Three documents inform the Final Project Brief:

- The Design Brief which describes the scope and scale of the buildings.
- The Definitive Business Case (DBC) which sets out a detailed financial analysis of the full costs of the new children's hospital and satellite centres. The associated benefits of the programme are also considered in full in the DBC. The DBC presents the case for investing in the new children's hospital and satellite centres programme including the investment in the capital element, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and an integration programme.
- The Programme Execution Plan which documents the programme delivery methodology for the capital, ICT and integration programmes.

On 26 April I announced that the Government has approved the investment required to enable the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board to award the construction contracts for the building of the main children's hospital on the St James's Hospital campus and the two Paediatric Outpatients and Urgent Care Centres on the Tallaght and Connolly Hospitals campuses.

The NPHDB is continuing to ensure that every stage of the project is delivered in accordance with national policy to optimal design and value for money, and along with the Children's Hospital Group Board, continues to work closely with the HSE and my Department to deliver this much-needed world-class hospital.

1197. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card applications that are waiting to be processed. [27251/17]

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

Medical Card Delays

1198. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the average wait time for a medical card application to be processed. [27252/17]

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

Medical Card Data

1199. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card applications from County Louth currently waiting to be processed; the length of time they have been waiting to be processed; and the expected timeframe for processing these applications. [27253/17]

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

Medical Card Administration

1200. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed to process medical card applications; the number of staff vacancies that exist within this complement ; and the length of time that these vacancies have existed. [27254/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP

visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Administration

1201. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the measures that have been put in place to tackle the backlog in processing medical card applications; and the expected time-frame to clear the backlog. [27255/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme

1202. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to parliamentary question number 227 of 6 October 2016, the reason for the delay in amending the application form for the long term illness scheme in order to replace offensive terminology used to define a recognised condition under the scheme; his views on whether legislative changes are required to complete this action; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the approved medication section of the LTI scheme web page on the HSE's website has also to be changed to reflect the HSE's usage of the more appropriate term of intellectual disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27256/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The term mental handicap, as used on the Long Term Illness Scheme application form, reflects the wording used in S.I. No. 277/1971 - Health Services (Amendment) Regulations 1971, which prescribed conditions to which the scheme applies.

Officials in my Department have sought legal advice in relation to amending the wording on the LTI application form. This process is ongoing and the Deputy's concerns are being considered in that context.

Services for People with Disabilities

1203. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the details of the budget allocations which have been provided to a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal for each of the years since its establishment and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27257/17]

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

1204. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to utilising agency staff working at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal to fill vacant permanent positions at the unit; if a request to use agency staff in this way was received by the HSE from the service provider; if so, the dates that the requests were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27258/17]

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.

Hospital Groups

1205. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the oversight of the performance of hospital groups by the HSE and the accountability of the performance of hospital groups to him in view of the fact that a large number of parliamentary questions related to issues within hospitals and patient services are being referred for answer to the hospital groups themselves; his views on whether this may create an issue with respect to proper accountability and impartiality; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27267/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is responsible to the Minister for delivering the performance set out in its National Service Plan. To assist it in delivering on its commitments, the HSE has revised and enhanced its Performance and Accountability Framework for 2017. The Framework sets out how the HSE including the national divisions, the hospital groups and individual managers will be held to account for their performance.

It makes explicit the responsibilities of health service managers in the four equally important domains of performance which are: access to services; the quality and safety of those services; doing this within the financial resources available; and effectively harnessing the efforts of the workforce. The emphasis of the Framework is on recognising good performance, improving performance at all levels of the health service and ensuring that individual managers are held to account for their performance.

My Department oversees and monitors the HSE's implementation of its performance accountability framework and monitors implementation of the HSE corporate plan and annual national service plans.

Diabetes Strategy

1206. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fully implement the paediatrics diabetes model of care published in December 2015; the timeframe for all vacant posts in the paediatric diabetes services nationally to be filled; the timeframe for a paediatric diabetes consultant to be appointed to Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27272/17]

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.

Question No. 1207 answered with Question No. 1060.

Hospital Services

1208. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health when posts will be filled which funding is available for to fully implement the paediatrics diabetes model of care published in December 2015; when the post for paediatrics diabetes consultant will be filled in University Hospital Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27294/17]

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.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

1209. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by each hospital group for nursing recruitment in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the number of trips taken abroad for recruitment; the countries which were visited; the cost of each trip; the number of nurses recruited by each hospital group from these trips; the number of nurses which commenced employment following recruitment process in each hospital group; and the number still in employment 12 months later in each hospital group. [27325/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Questions Nos. 1210 and 1211 answered with Question No. 1036.

Services for People with Disabilities

1212. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will have access to therapy that has been recommended for them. [27363/17]

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.

Disability Services Provision

1213. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the extra funding for extra staff that will be required under the progressing disability plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27372/17]

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.

Disability Services Provision

1214. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which have been put in place to ensure that non-clinical services such as home teaching and preschool support staff will be protected under the progressing disability plan. [27373/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

1215. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if 5,000 children with disabilities will now be included in the service from a present number of 2,500 with regard to the implementation of the progressing disability strategy in the CHO9 area; the way in which the staff and extra services will be provided to cater for all; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27374/17]

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.

Disability Services Provision

1216. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the measures in place to ensure that specialist service providers are not undermined in the move to the progressing disability strategy (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27375/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1217. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the number of persons on waiting lists for operations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27382/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

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 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 their implementation is ongoing. It is expected that the Inpatient / Daycase and Outpatient Plans will considerably reduce the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. The Scoliosis Action Plan aims to ensure that no patient is waiting more than four months by the end of 2017. Under these Plans, since early February, over 14,200 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List and nearly 49,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In addition, last December I granted approval to the NTPF for the first tranche of funding in the region of €5m, for an initiative focused on those waiting longest for Daycase treatment with a view to ensuring that in excess of 2,000 patients waiting more than 18 months for a daycase

procedure will have received an offer of an appointment for their procedure by the end of June. The NTPF has advised that to date over 2,500 patients files have been transferred to private hospitals under this initiative, 631 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 178 patients have received their procedure.

Cross-Border Health Initiatives

1218. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the rationale behind the decision to establish a cap of €130 on reimbursements to persons availing of the cross-border directive EU 2011/24 for outpatient diagnostic procedures; if the cap of €130 is a breach of the directive; if all diagnostic procedures carried out by the HSE or commissioned by the HSE from private providers are priced at €130 for accounting purposes only; if a ready reckoner will be established by the HSE similar to the one used by consultants to assist persons in establishing the HSE costs for procedures carried out under the EU directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27392/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 1219 answered with Question No. 1060.

Health Services Provision

1220. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27403/17]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

1221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a wheelchair by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27409/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1222. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the date of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27410/17]

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.

HSE Expenditure

1223. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of private investigation firms listed on all of the payment systems of the HSE for the past five years and to date in 2017; the number of those private investigation firms that were engaged to carry out work on behalf of the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27411/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

1224. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure there will be adequate residential capacity for those persons that require higher level or more complex care as part of a review into the nursing home support scheme. [27421/17]

1225. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure that all elements of care which are currently included in the nursing home support scheme will remain unchanged. [27422/17]

1226. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will introduce changes to the appeals process of the nursing home support scheme. [27423/17]

1241. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if the current pricing system for long term residential care facilities will be maintained [27486/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1224 to 1226, inclusive, and 1241 together.

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The Scheme covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of everyday living;
- Laundry service

There are no plans to amend the services covered by the Scheme.

The legislation underpinning the Nursing Homes Support Scheme requires each private nursing home to negotiate and agree a price for long-term residential care services with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) should they wish to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme. The NTPF has statutory independence in the performance of its function, and negotiates with each nursing home on an individual basis. The NTPF may examine the records and accounts of nursing homes as part of the process with the objective of setting a fair price which delivers value for money to the individual and the State. In negotiating with nursing homes, the NTPF has regard to:

- Costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money;
- Price(s) previously charged;
- Local market price; and
- Budgetary constraints and the obligation on the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. A number of issues have been identified for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanisms by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

The issue of an appeals process will also be considered in this context.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee the review of the pricing system for private long-term residential care facilities. This Steering Committee is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the NTPF, and work in this area is well advanced.

In relation to the pricing system in public residential facilities, Section 33(2) of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act, 2009 provides for the HSE to charge for the cost of care in long-term residential care settings. The components that make up the cost of care are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Occupational Therapy

1227. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists for children who are assigned to County Louth; the number of occupational therapists for children who have been employed in County Louth in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; the recommended number of children one occupational therapist should be responsible for under current guidelines or best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27425/17]

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

Home Help Service Provision

1228. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will allocate additional home help hours to counties Longford and Westmeath in view of recent reports which have outlined a substantial drop in the number of hours within this area. [27428/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

1229. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 23 May 2017, the delays that exist in accessing timely home care packages within CHOs for persons wishing to avail of ESD; the number of persons that have not been able to access ESD due to a lack of or delay in accessing home care packages in each CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27429/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

1230. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 23 May 2017, the number and value of home help and home care packages provided for those eligible for ESD in 2015 and 2016, in tabular form; the number of requests for home help and home care packages for those eligible for ESD in 2015 and 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27430/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

1231. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27434/17]

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

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

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

Respite Care Services Provision

1232. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if he is considering proposals from an agency other than the HSE regarding the provision of respite services for persons with disabilities in County Louth; the nature of these proposals; the monetary value of such proposals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27441/17]

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.

Departmental Contracts

1233. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011 in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27453/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has not made any payments made to the company in question since 2011. I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy regarding any contracts it may have with this company. Details for other bodies under the aegis of the Department are operational matters for the bodies concerned and the Deputy should contact the relevant Director/CEO/Registrar directly.

Hospital Services

1234. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of children

with diabetes attending Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin diabetes service in 2015 and 2016; the amount of whole time equivalent consultant time that was dedicated to this service in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27479/17]

1235. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin to put children with type 1 diabetes of 5 years of age and under on insulin pump treatment; the waiting time to put children with type 1 diabetes between 6 and 16 years of age on insulin pump treatment; the number of children on the waiting list for insulin pump treatment; the age of these children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27480/17]

1236. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of new referrals of children with diabetes by county which were received by the diabetes service in Our Lady's Children Hospital Crumlin in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27481/17]

1237. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the ratio of whole time equivalent dietitians per patient in Our Lady's children's hospital Crumlin and Temple Street diabetes services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27482/17]

1238. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the whole time equivalent psychology professional time dedicated to the diabetes service in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin; the number of patients that have availed of this service in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27483/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1234 to 1238, inclusive, together.

In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff

1239. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the agreed retirement date of a person (details supplied) at Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin; the date on which their replacement will take up the post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27484/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

1240. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 894 of 2 May 2017, the agencies to which the disability capital programme funding has been allocated in County Louth in 2016 and 2017; and the amount of funding allocated to each agency [27485/17]

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.

Question No. 1241 answered with Question No. 1224.

Hospital Appointments Status

1242. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [27489/17]

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

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

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

1243. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date regarding the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27491/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, a number of key issues have been identified for more detailed consideration across Departments and Agencies.

An Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group has been established to oversee the implementation of certain recommendations contained in the Review. This Group is chaired by the Department of Health and includes representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the HSE, the Revenue Commissioners, and when required, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). These recommendations include:

- The implementation of administrative reforms to the Scheme;
- A review by the NTPF of present pricing arrangements in private residential facilities; and
- A Value For Money and Policy Review of the differences in the comparative cost of public and private long-term residential care.

This work is currently underway. The Value for Money and Policy Review will commence in 2017 and will assess reasons for and components of current cost differentials.

Separately, the 2015 Review recommended further examination of the position of family farms and businesses. Subsequently a commitment was included in the Programme for a Partnership Government to deal with this issue. This examination is ongoing and at an advanced stage.

An initial report on the progress of the NHSS Review recommendations was submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Health in September 2016.

It is important to remember that the NHSS is largely underpinned by primary legislation, and as such any changes to the Scheme will require legislative implementation. I have committed to prioritising and fast tracking this examination of family farms and businesses and bringing forward changes to the legislation to deal with the uncertainty that is being felt by farming and business families in line with the Programme for a Partnership Government.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1244. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the application for the addition of the freestyle libre flash glucose monitoring system to the long-term illness reimbursement list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27492/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Staff Data

1245. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the whole time equivalent allocation of occupational therapists for County Louth; if all positions and hours are currently filled; the number of County Louth based occupational therapists currently on maternity leave; if any County Louth based occupational therapists are due to commence maternity leave; the current staffing complement actually in position; the recruitment which has taken place to fill vacant posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27522/17]

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

1246. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health when the orthodontic procedure for a person (details supplied) will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27529/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 1247 answered with Question No. 1176.

Services for People with Disabilities

1248. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a person (details supplied) who will need to be integrated to a new environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27581/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Supply

1249. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the medication Respreeza available to persons with alpha 1 genetic emphysema; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27589/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

1250. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to instil public confidence in the national immunisation programme for HPV; his further plans to use mass media campaigns to encourage better take up of this vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27595/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Media campaigns in relation to immunisation programmes are a service matter. I have referred this question to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

1251. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the extension of the national immunisation programme for HPV to boys in view of the fact that 39,000 men worldwide die of HPV related cancer each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[27596/17]

1252. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his Department is examining the positive impact a universal vaccination programme for HPV has had on countries such as the United States of America, Australia and Canada; if a health technology assessment on universal vaccination has been completed by HIQA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27597/17]

1256. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health his plans to roll out the HPV vaccine to boys; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27602/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1251, 1252 and 1256 together.

The immunisation programme in Ireland is based on the advice of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC). NIAC is a committee of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland comprising of experts in a number of specialties including infectious diseases, paediatrics and public health. The committee's recommendations are informed by public health advice and international best practice. All relevant and appropriate information is taken into account when deciding to make changes to the State's immunisation programmes.

NIAC has made a recommendation that the HPV vaccine should be given to boys. My Department asked the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to carry out a health technology assessment (HTA). The Board of HIQA approved the initiation of the HTA in March 2017 to examine the extension of the current HPV immunisation programme to include boys. Work has commenced and the target date for completion of the HTA, which will include a complex model to simulate disease transmission, is September 2018. Any decision concerning the extension of the programme will be informed by the results of the HTA.

Vaccination Programme

1253. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the availability of the HPV vaccine to girls that have previously declined or missed the administration of the vaccine in school as part of the national immunisation programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27598/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Availability of the HPV vaccine to girls that have previously declined or missed the administration of the vaccine in school as part of the national immunisation programme is a service matter. I have referred this question to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

1254. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to communicate the importance and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine to parents and separately to 12 year olds in order to increase the uptake of the national immunisation programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27599/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Communication of the importance and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine to support the uptake of the national immunisation programme is a service matter. I have referred this question to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply to the Deputy.

Questions - Written Answers
Vaccination Programme

1255. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the process of vaccination will be named as a key prevention tactic in the upcoming national cancer strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27600/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Government approval to the draft National Cancer Strategy 2017-2016 will be sought shortly. The Strategy will have a focus on cancer prevention across a range of measures.

Question No. 1256 answered with Question No. 1251.

Medicinal Products

1257. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason day-case private patients in public hospitals receive oncology drugs for a per diem statutory charge of €407 or €329 depending on the type of hospital in view of the fact that the day case drug cost is an average €1,500 per person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27603/17]

1258. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason the full cost of oncology drugs provided to day-case private patients in public hospitals cannot be charged to the health insurance companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27604/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1257 and 1258 together.

The Health (Amendment) Act 2013 prescribes the charges applicable to private patients treated in public hospitals. Private patients are liable for a daily charge rather than a case-based charge for specific treatment and the charges differ depending on (i) whether the patient was an in-patient or daycase (ii) the category of hospital in which treatment was received and (iii) whether the patient was accommodated in a single or multiple occupancy room.

The setting of the charges for private patients is informed by the calculation of the average cost per bedday for each hospital category, which takes account of the cost of, non-consultant doctors, nursing, administration and support staff, diagnostic services (such as x-rays and other scans), medical and surgical supplies (including medicines), operating theatres, laboratory services (such as blood tests etc.), capital costs. The private in-patient charges are intended to go towards meeting these costs.

Since 2014, a case-based funding model for public hospital care, called Activity Based Funding, has been implemented on a phased basis. It is the Government's intention in due course to develop policy proposals for the introduction of a case-based charging system for private patients in public hospitals. Significant policy work on this model will be required given the complexity and breadth of issues to be examined and addressed.

Hospital Charges

1259. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a public hospital oncology consultant receives the same professional fee payment as an oncology consultant in a private hospital from health insurance companies for treating day case oncology private patients in public hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27605/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Health Insurance companies operate as commercial providers in a competitive market and as Minister for Health, I have no legal power to intervene in relation to their commercial decisions. The level of fees paid is a commercial decision made by individual health insurers.

Hospital Charges

1260. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the annual cost for all public hospitals for day case oncology drugs by public and private patients in each of the years 2012 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27606/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1261. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the age profile of persons waiting for operations in the South/South West Hospital Group as of 1 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27627/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1262. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting as of 1 June 2017 for x-rays, CT scans and MRIs in the South/South West Hospital Group by each hospital in the group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27628/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1263. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for an operation in the South/South West Hospital Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27629/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

1264. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied) with a speech and language therapist; the reason for the delays in securing a speech and language therapy appointment in Boyle, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27665/17]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

1265. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of children on the waiting list to see a speech and language therapist in counties Roscommon and Galway in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27666/17]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

1266. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided to ensure home care packages for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27668/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

1267. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of centres with regard to the primary care centre projects announced on 17 July 2012 that are now open. [27672/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Delivery of primary care infrastructure is a dynamic process, which evolves to take account of changing circumstances including the feasibility of implementation.

The table below gives details of the 35 locations announced on 17 July 2012, and their current status including estimated opening dates. One of these primary care centres is already operational and a further six are projected to open in 2017, and ten in 2018.

In addition, it should be noted that 57 primary care centres have been opened since 2011, and a further 12 primary care centres are projected to open in 2017 or early 2018, in addition to those shown in the following table.

Count	HSE Region	County	Location / PCT Name	Delivery Method	Project Status - Q1-Q2 2017
1	DML	Dublin	Rowlagh / North Clondalkin	Direct build	Stage 2a design team report completed. HSE finalising purchase agreement of site at Colinstown Park School. Purchase agreement is subject to planning permission being granted for the development.
2	DML	Dublin	Curlew Road / Crumlin / Drimnagh	Direct build	Planning permission in place
3	DML	Dublin	Knocklyon / Rathfarnham	Direct build	Planning permission in place
4	DML	Wicklow	Rathdrum	Operational Lease	Planning approved. HSE has finalised layouts. Construction due to commence to commence Q2 2017 and projected to open Q3 2018
5	DML	Kildare	Kilcock	PPP	In construction. Projected opening 2018
6	DNE	Dublin	Coolock / Darn-dale	PPP	In construction. Projected opening 2018
7	DNE	Dublin	Summerhill, north inner city Dublin	PPP	In construction. Projected opening 2018
8	DNE	Dublin	Balbriggan	Operational Lease	Construction completed Q2 2017, projected operational Q3 2017
9	DNE	Dublin	Swords	Operational Lease	Expressions of interest received. Currently being reviewed
10	DNE	Louth	Drogheda north	Operational Lease	Developer re-engaged. Existing building requires fitout. If legal discussions complete successfully, projected construction start Q2/Q3 2017, projected completion Q1 2018 and operational Q2 2018.
11	DNE	Meath	Laytown and Bettystown	Operational Lease	Project is progressing as operational lease. Schedule of accommodation under review
12	DNE	Meath	Kells	Operational Lease	Operational since Q1 2016
13	DNE	Monaghan	Carrickmacross	Operational Lease	Viable expression of interest has recently been received. Currently waiting for formal submissions.
14	South	Carlow	Tullow / Rathvilly / Hacketstown	Direct build	Adjoining landowner has re-engaged with HSE. Options being reviewed.

Questions - Written Answers

Count	HSE Region	County	Location / PCT Name	Delivery Method	Project Status - Q1-Q2 2017
15	South	Kilkenny	Kilkenny city (East)	Operational Lease	Priced offer approved. Letter of Intent issued.
16	South	Wexford	Wexford town	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening 2018
17	South	Waterford	Dungarvan	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening 2018
18	South	Waterford	Waterford city (east)	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening 2018
19	South	Cork	Cork city - Ballyphehane / Togher / Greenmount / The Lough	Operational Lease	Letter of Intent issued. Layouts being developed.
20	South	Kerry	Tralee	Operational Lease	Letter of Intent issued. Layouts being developed.
21	South	Tipperary	Carrick-on-Suir	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening 2018
22	South	Tipperary	Clonmel	Operational Lease	Reviewing accommodation requirements before progressing to stage 3
23	West	Tipperary	Thurles	Operational Lease	Letter of Intent issued 10/12/2015. Project progressing towards Agreement for Lease.
24	West	Limerick	Limerick city (Ballinacurra / Weston)	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening late 2017
25	West	Clare	Ennis	Operational Lease	Expressions of interest received. Currently being reviewed
26	West	Galway	Tuam	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening late 2017
27	West	Galway	Gort	Operational Lease	Letter of Intent withdrawn 24/05/2016. Possible re-advertisement.
28	West	Roscommon	Boyle	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening late 2017
29	West	Roscommon	Ballaghaderreen	Operational Lease	Letter of Intent issued 27/10/2015. Project progressing to Agreement for Lease.
30	West	Mayo	Westport	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening 2018
31	West	Mayo	Claremorris	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening late 2017
32	West	Sligo	Ballymote	PPP	In Construction. Projected opening late 2017
33	West	Donegal	Dungloe - An Clochán Liath	Operational Lease	Re-advertised for Operational Lease option. Expressions of interest received.
34	West	Donegal	Donegal town	Operational Lease	Expressions of interest received. Currently being reviewed

Coolock and Darndale were announced as two separate locations

The mechanism and timescale for delivery of primary care centres is dependent on a number of factors. Some of these factors are outside the control of the Health Service Executive. Regardless of the delivery mechanism, all potential primary care infrastructure is subject to suitable locations being offered / provided / available, to successful planning processes and GP commitment to sharing accommodation and delivering health care services with HSE staff. In addition the operational lease mechanism is subject to market pressures such as the developers' access to adequate financing.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

1268. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the UK's competition and markets authority decision to investigate the manufacturers of the medicine remicade as a result of the latter's alleged abuse of a dominant market position arising from its use of an anti competitive discount scheme intended it is alleged to prevent the use of more affordable biosimilar medicines; if his attention has been further drawn to similar practices in the market here; his views on whether a similar investigation is required here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27675/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is an independent statutory body with a dual mandate to enforce competition and consumer protection law in Ireland. If the Deputy or any other individual or business has evidence which suggests that anti-competitive behaviour is occurring in Ireland, I would strongly encourage them to take the matter up with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

I am not aware of issues having been raised in Ireland in relation to the subject matter of the Deputy's question. However, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply regarding the position in the public health service.

As the Deputy may be aware, my Department is in the process of developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy, to promote the use of biosimilar medicines in Ireland. A key objective of this strategy is to encourage biosimilar manufacturers to enter the market in Ireland and to compete with manufactures of the biologic medicines.

Questions Nos. 1269 and 1270 answered with Question No. 1059.

Mental Health Services Staff

1271. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to the announcement of two new appointments to counties Sligo and Leitrim CAMHS, his views on whether this will be enough to cater for the backlog of over 400 children needing access to the service in the region; if further appointments will be forthcoming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27683/17]

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 Consultant Recruitment

1272. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide funding for the appointment of one extra full time consultant ophthalmic surgeon for Beaumont hospital, Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27690/17]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data

1273. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on a waiting list for aids and appliances in CHO area 9; the length of time persons have been on the list; the details of the waiting list for each of the items under aids and appliances such as orthopaedic footwear, wheelchairs and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27691/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

1274. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27711/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has paid €125,706 in total to the company in question in relation to two projects, the development of an evidence based National Oral Health policy and the development of a performance measurement framework for drug and alcohol task forces.

The use of the HP Deprivation Index in the context of the National Oral Health Policy development was confined to a small sampling exercise at an early stage of policy development.

I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy regarding any contracts it may have with this company. Details for other bodies under the aegis of the Department are operational matters for the bodies concerned and the Deputy should contact the relevant Director/CEO/Registrar directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

1275. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the current waiting times for assessment for autism by the early intervention teams by area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27720/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1276. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27724/17]

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.

Disability Services Funding

1277. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated for the HSE preschool support worker grant in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the number of applications which have been received for the grant in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the number of grants that have been allocated for same; his plans to increase funds to this grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27726/17]

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.

Disability Support Services

1278. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a situation in which a person (details supplied) has been denied 4.5 hours per week preschool support despite having a number of developmental issues that early services have highlighted as requiring immediate attention; his views on whether it is acceptable that this person is being denied the support they need in order to develop to their full ability; if this decision will be reversed in order that this person will have access to the necessary supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27727/17]

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.

Health Services Funding

1279. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide resources at a unit (details supplied) for the provision of non talk therapy such as art, music and drama, in view of the fact that its patients are children under 18 years of age; the steps the HSE plans to take regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27743/17]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

1280. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if the tendering process has begun further to the outsourcing of respite services to external service providers and non statutory agencies in counties Sligo and Leitrim; if so, the way in which it was advertised; the time-frame for when planned and consistent respite services will be available in counties Sligo and Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27744/17]

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.

Question No. 1281 answered with Question No. 1008.

Home Care Packages Provision

1282. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care package payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27752/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the

Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

1283. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the services available for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 who suffers from ASD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27754/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Supply

1284. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if a clinic (details supplied) is licensed to supply methadone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27755/17]

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

Disability Services Provision

1285. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of transport for a person (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that an application was made to the HSE in January 2017 and that no response has issued to date in 2017; and if he will liaise with the HSE regarding same [27756/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The provision of transport of adults with a disability attending HSE funded day services is not a core health service. When a person cannot avail of a day service because they do not have transport to attend, some transport may be provided by disability service providers on a case by case basis as resources allow.

The HSE Social Care Division are committed to establishing a working group to rationalise the provision of transport and to maximise equitable access and efficiencies and are working with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and voluntary providers to progress this issue. The NTA have 17 transport co-ordinating units called Local Link. Local Link provides safe secure and reliable public transport services in local and rural areas of Ireland.

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

Mental Health Services Staff

1286. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health nurses on a HSE panel waiting to be offered fulltime positions. [27757/17]

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 Staff

1287. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE has paid to date in 2017 to agencies for mental health nurses [27758/17]

1288. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the staff bill for mental health nurses paid directly by the HSE as opposed to that for mental health nurses employed by agencies. [27759/17]

1289. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the number of general nurses on a HSE panel waiting to be offered a fulltime position. [27760/17]

1290. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount the HSE paid to date in 2017 to agencies for general nurses. [27761/17]

1291. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure for general nurses paid directly by the HSE as opposed to the expenditure for general nurses from agencies. [27762/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1287 to 1291, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Preschool Services

1292. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if a place at a preschool can be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27763/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1293. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if the freestyle diabetes testing device will be approved for public funding on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27765/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Agency Staff

1294. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE employ agency staff in view of the fact that most of the agency staff are on a HSE panel awaiting a full-time position with the HSE (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27766/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

National Stroke Programme Implementation

1295. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 483 of 23 May 2017, the additional capital investment in patient equipment and monitoring equipment that would be required in all hospitals to bring stroke units to quality standards and to meet requirements for approximately 400 stroke unit beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27767/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Discharges

1296. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the average number of delayed discharges per hospital per month due to the lack of home care packages for each of the years 2014 to 2016 as an update on information in a document (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27768/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Data

1297. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care package recipients per 1,000 population over 65 years of age by CHO in each of the years 2014 to 2016 as an update on information in a document (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27769/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Administration

1298. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the steps that were taken on the recommendations of the Department of Health and Children evaluation of home care packages, November 2009; the recommendations that were acted upon; the way in which they were implemented; the steps that were not acted upon; the reason for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27770/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): An independent evaluation of Home Care Packages published by the Department in December 2009, indicated that while the Initiative had achieved its basic objectives since its introduction in 2006, various planning and delivery improvements were required overall. These related, for example, to standardising access and process, and various aspects of governance, including management and financial information.

In 2010 the HSE finalised National Guidelines and Procedures for the Standardised Implementation of the Home Care Package Scheme. These Guidelines incorporated the recommendations from the evaluation. A Best Practice Group including representation across the HSE Areas was established and operated for about two years to support the implementation of the Guidelines. The implementation of the Home Care Package Scheme, in accordance with these Guidelines, helps to ensure that each application for the Scheme is processed and assessed in a consistent way. To assist further, a suite of standard documentation was developed and circulated to support the Guidelines.

A new Procurement Framework for Home Care Services came into effect in mid-2012. This framework, which requires service providers to meet defined minimum standards applied to services procured by the HSE from external providers and the process was most recently repeated in 2016. Providers of home care services are monitored through Service Level Agreements with the HSE. They are required to provide a prescribed range of information in relation to the services they provide, and are supervised through regular local operational meetings and reviews of clients' care plans. The purpose of these measures is to promote quality and safety and to ensure a more standardised approach to service provision nationally. Home Care Services are reviewed regularly by the HSE. In addition, the HSE has in place a complaints procedure that is available to all service users.

Quality improvement and monitoring of services are on-going. In 2017 the HSE has provided each Community Health Organisation (CHO) with an additional resource and guidance to support this function. The HSE monitors the resources assigned to and utilised for home care services including Home Care Packages. It also monitors and reviews the care provided to individual clients by HSE professionals such as public health nurses.

The procurement of a national IT system was not progressed as new developments in home care began to emerge in the period 2011 to date. These developments include the negotiation of a new contract for HSE employed home helps, discussions on the potential amalgamation of the Home Help service and the Home Care Package scheme into a single funded service to streamline access for clients, and consideration of the regulation of home care. In this regard, the Department is currently engaged in a detailed process to determine what type of home care scheme is best for Ireland. This process will consider the future design of both the funding and regulation systems for these crucial services.

In light of the considerable on-going work on the future regulation and financing of home care it would be prudent at this time to hold off on decisions on the nature and scope of an IT system. The development and implementation of an IT system across home care remains an

important objective, however, and in the interim, work is on-going with the CHO Areas to ensure that data collection is based on standard definitions and timelines.

Finally, the HSE commissioned a consultancy firm to perform an activity and resource review of Home Care Services, including Home Help and Home Care Packages. The review looked at a number of service improvement initiatives and at models of service delivery, both in Ireland and internationally. The review is available at www.hse.ie.

Home Care Packages Data

1299. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 484 of 23 May 2017, the number of persons aged under 65 years of age of those in 2015 and 2016 in receipt of home help of which 4,291 and 4,121 that were persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27771/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Data

1300. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for home care packages that were submitted by persons under 65 years of age in 2016 in CHO 1; the number of these applications which were successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27772/17]

1301. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for home care packages that were submitted by persons under 65 years of age in 2016 in CHO 4; the number of these applications that were successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27773/17]

1302. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications for home care packages that were submitted by persons under 65 years of age in 2016 in CHO 6; the number of these applications that were successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27774/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1300 to 1302, inclusive, together.

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1303. **Deputy Barry Cowen** 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. [27776/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

1304. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the concerns of a person (details supplied) regarding their child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27777/17]

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.

Question Heading for question(s) 1305

1305. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 441 of 9 May 2017, the reason for each of these declines; if additional resources are required for community based mental health teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27787/17]

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.

Suicide Prevention

1306. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter with regard to a person (details supplied) concerning further education opportunities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27788/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres

1307. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the services, facilities and staffing levels that will be allocated to the new primary health care facility due to open in Kilcock, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27791/17]

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

Hospital Services

1308. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when the chemotherapy services at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore will resume in view of the fact that this service has not been available since March 2017 (details supplied). [27809/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's question relates to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Health Services Funding

1309. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if funds will be made available for improvement works to be carried out on the interior and facilities at the royal city of Dublin hospital on Baggot Street; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27813/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Mental Health Services

1310. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding the disposal or otherwise of the site of the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum in view of the commencement of work on the new national forensic mental health hospital in Portrane; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27814/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The disposal or otherwise of the site of the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum cannot proceed until such time as the hospital is vacated, following the completion of the new National Forensic Mental Health Services Hospital in Portrane. The Central Mental Hospital is part of the State property portfolio under the Office of Public Works, which is a State Agency of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Therefore the matter of the Deputy's queries regarding disposal or otherwise would be a matter for that Agency/Department.

Rare Diseases Strategy

1311. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of establishing and operating an all -island rare diseases registry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27820/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Rare Disease Plan for Ireland 2014-2018 recommended that a network of rare disease registries covering the island of Ireland be developed taking into account relevant legislation and international best practice. The issue of north south cooperation relating to rare diseases so as to improve information provision to

rare disease patients, registries and the potential for collaboration on the management of patients is under consideration as part of ongoing North/South work.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

1312. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a hearing aid by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27850/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

1313. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health when the National Treatment Purchase Fund will be fully accessible; the way in which it will be applied for; the criteria for persons to access the fund; the hospitals both public and private that will be participating in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27874/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In 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 been published and their implementation is ongoing. The Inpatient / Daycase and Outpatient Plans focus on reducing the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. The Scoliosis Action Plan aims to ensure that no patient who requires scoliosis surgery will be waiting more than four months for surgery by the end of 2017. Under these Plans, since early February, over 14,200 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List and nearly 49,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In addition, the NTPF is currently rolling out its Daycase Waiting List Initiative focused on those waiting longest for daycase treatment, with a view to ensuring that in excess of 2,000 patients waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure will have received an offer of an appointment for their procedure by the end of June. The NTPF has advised that to date over 2,500 patients files have been transferred to private hospitals under this Initiative, 631 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 178 patients have received their procedure.

Appointments to State Boards

1314. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Health if any former Deputies have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the public appointments service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28216/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The nomination and appointment process for boards of bodies under the aegis of my Department is set out in legislation. In line with Government Decision S180/20/10/1617 of 2014 and Guidelines set out by the Department of

Public Expenditure and Reform relating to the advertising for expressions of interest in vacancies on State Boards, my Department in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) currently advertises for board vacancies as they arise, where I, as Minister for Health, have nominating rights under relevant legislation.

To my knowledge, none of the appointments I have made from the lists of candidates who had expressed an interest to the Public Appointments Service in serving on a Board, and who were found to have the appropriate competencies and skills for the position, have been former TDs.

Brexit Issues

1315. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the role his officials have in relation to coordinating the bid to attract EU agencies to locate here. [25628/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As a consequence of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) must relocate to another Member State. The Government believes that moving the Agency to Dublin would offer a sustainable solution which will minimise any disruption to its operations caused by the relocation.

On 25 October 2016 the Government established an interdepartmental/interagency working group, chaired by my Department, to prepare a bid for the relocation of the Agency to Dublin.

My officials have commissioned and launched a promotional brochure and website, setting out the advantages of a move to Dublin for the EMA, and are also co-ordinating a political, diplomatic and multimedia campaign to gain support for the Dublin bid. Irish Diplomats are also campaigning in every Member State capital to promote the Dublin bid.

It is expected that official bid to be the new host city for the EMA will have to be submitted to the E.U. Council by the 31st July 2017. My officials are currently working intensely in conjunction with the Interdepartmental group and officials from other Departments and Agencies as appropriate, to ensure that a high quality bid is ready for submission by the deadline.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1316. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the ENT waiting list in University Hospital Waterford which is one of the highest in the country under the national treatment purchase fund as a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27648/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Funding

1317. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the cost of deploying a mobile cath lab to University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27653/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have formally approved the deployment of a mobile cath lab at University Hospital Waterford (UHW) for a specific period during 2017. As recommended by the Herity report, an additional €500,000 has been allocated to the hospital for 2017. I have asked the HSE to maximise the benefit for patients from that funding, in respect of both additional sessions at the existing cath lab and the temporary use of a mobile cath lab for a specific period. The mobile cath lab will be procured in line with the normal HSE procurement process. In relation to the query concerning the cost of deploying a mobile cath mobile to UHW, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

1318. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health if autologous haematopoietic stem cell transplantation treatment for multiple sclerosis will be made available here; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27940/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Autologous haematopoietic stem cell transplantation treatment is a potentially promising treatment for a small subset of patients with multiple sclerosis. It is considered a highly aggressive treatment with very significant side-effects. Decisions, therefore relating to appropriate treatment for multiple sclerosis are a matter for clinicians in consultation with patients and their families.

Medicinal Products Regulation

1319. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the regulations for the prescription of Epilim to pregnant women; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27941/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the Deputy's question refers to the prescribing of Epilim. Epilim is a product which contains the active substance sodium valproate, which is among a number of medicines licensed in Ireland for the treatment of epilepsy. Valproate medicines have been authorised via national procedures in all EU Member States and in Norway and Iceland; valproate-containing medicines are also approved nationally in Ireland to treat bipolar disorder.

It is well established that women who take anti-epileptics during pregnancy face a higher risk of having a child with birth defects than women in the general population. This risk is further increased if a woman takes more than one anti-epileptic medicine during pregnancy. However, epilepsy and seizures during pregnancy also carry a significant risk of complications for both the woman and the unborn child. Anti-epileptic medicines should not be stopped abruptly during pregnancy as this may lead to breakthrough seizures that could have serious consequences for the woman and the unborn child.

The product information Summary of Product Characteristic (SmPC) and package leaflet for sodium valproate includes detailed information on use, precautions and recommendations, as well as information on the known side effects of the medicine associated with use in pregnancy and more generally. The SmPC and package leaflet are issued when a medicine is first licensed for use and are reviewed and updated as necessary throughout the lifetime of the medicine. Each pack of the medicine dispensed carries a copy of the latest package leaflet.

In March of this year, the Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) initiated a new review of the use of valproate-containing medicines

in the treatment of women and girls who are pregnant or of childbearing age. This review is examining the available evidence and will consult with relevant stakeholder groups, including holding a public hearing to listen directly to the experience of EU patients with these medicines, so that this experience can be taken into account as part of the Committee's considerations. A previous EMA review of valproate, in 2014, resulted in measures to strengthen the warnings and restrictions on the use of valproate medicines in women and girls, due to the risk of malformations and developmental problems in babies who are exposed to valproate in the womb.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is the competent authority for the regulation of medicines in Ireland. The HPRA has highlighted the results of previous reviews of valproate to Irish healthcare professionals and provided revised educational materials for both healthcare professionals and patients. The HPRA has already informed healthcare professionals and relevant patient groups that the new EMA review is underway, and will disseminate the results of the review to Irish patients and healthcare professionals as soon as they become available.

In October 2016, the HSE's Medicines Management Programme (MMP) launched its Valproate Toolkit, an online resource consisting of a patient information booklet, summary guide for prescribers and a patient/prescriber checklist. This information highlights that sodium valproate should not be prescribed to girls or women of childbearing age or pregnant women unless other treatments are ineffective or not tolerated. The MMP is in contact with the HPRA regarding the EMA's current review of valproate, and any further recommendations will be considered.

Services for People with Disabilities

1320. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the recent reports of children with disabilities being put on waiting lists of over two years for an initial assessment, despite the provisions of the Disability Act 2005 which includes a legal requirement that an assessment must be carried out within three months from the date of application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27949/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services

1321. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the measures in place for young persons that reach 18 years of age while on the waiting list for CAMHS, in view of the fact that in February 2017 there were 2,520 children and young persons on waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27950/17]

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

Health Services Data

1322. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 444 of 16 May 2017, the number of HSE homeless section 39 funded services that received funding in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of these organisations that also received section ten funding from central government [27953/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Parliamentary question number 444 was referred to the Health Service Executive, as it was a service matter, and I understand they issued a response to the Deputy on 30 May 2017.

In response to the Deputy's subsequent questions on this issue, as this is a service matter, it has again been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

1323. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the details of the National Treatment Purchase Fund fees paid to private nursing homes, by county; and the reason different sums are paid to different nursing homes in the same county as is occurring in County Limerick. [27980/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. A financial assessment is carried out by the HSE to determine how much a participant will contribute to the cost of their care.

The Scheme covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of everyday living;
- Laundry service.

The legislation underpinning the Nursing Homes Support Scheme requires each private nursing home to negotiate and agree a price for long-term residential care services with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) should they wish to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme. The NTPF has statutory independence in the performance of its function, and negotiates with each nursing home on an individual basis. The NTPF may examine the records and accounts of nursing homes as part of the process with the objective of setting a fair price which delivers value for money to the individual and the State. In negotiating with

nursing homes, the NTPF has regard to:

- Costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money;
- Price(s) previously charged;
- Local market price; and
- Budgetary constraints and the obligation on the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

Section 41 of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act, 2009 provides for the NTPF to notify the HSE of the prices agreed with the proprietors of private nursing homes. The weekly cost of all private and voluntary residential facilities is published on a monthly basis on the HSE website <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/nhss/costs.html>.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. The Review recognised that in order to maximise the take-up of the Scheme when it was first introduced in 2009, and to ensure there were no delays for those wishing to avail of the Scheme, the NTPF used inherited historic prices with in-built price disparities as an initial baseline for agreements with proprietors of nursing homes. Although good progress has been made since then in reducing price disparities, the Review recognises that differences still remain between facilities and regions, sometimes delineated by county boundaries.

The Review identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanisms by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee the review of the pricing system for private long-term residential care facilities. This Steering Committee is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the NTPF, and work in this area is well advanced.

Hospital Appointments Administration

1324. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27994/17]

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

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

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

Health Services

1325. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a list of physiotherapists in County Kildare that will treat children with scoliosis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28009/17]

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

Health Services Expenditure

1326. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost per child of introducing a baby box scheme similar to that operating in Scotland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28015/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Orthodontic Services Provision

1327. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if orthodontics will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28016/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Card Applications

1328. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application on discretionary grounds for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28020/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP

visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Applications

1329. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application on discretionary grounds for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28021/17]

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

Medical Card Applications

1330. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28022/17]

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

Medical Card Applications

1331. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28023/17]

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

Medical Card Applications

1332. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made

on a medical card application on discretionary grounds for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28024/17]

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

Medical Card Applications

1333. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28025/17]

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

Health Services Provision

1334. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when additional resources for a service (details supplied) will be provided in view of the fact that it was agreed in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28030/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Health is currently in discussion with the HSE in relation to this issue.

Hospital Appointments Status

1335. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied) in County Galway in view of the urgency of the medical circumstances in this case; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28037/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

1336. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28038/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1337. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28041/17]

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

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

National Treatment Purchase Fund Waiting Times

1338. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider amending the criteria in respect of the National Treatment Purchase Fund scheme to shorten the waiting list duration for elderly persons awaiting replacement hip surgery and removal of eye cataracts

in view of the substantial volume of persons awaiting such surgeries and the effects of the medical condition is hindering their mobility and everyday lives. [28042/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

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 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 their implementation is ongoing. It is expected that the Inpatient/Daycase and Outpatient Plans will considerably reduce the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. The Scoliosis Action Plan aims to ensure that no patient is waiting more than four months by the end of 2017. Under these Plans, since early February, over 14,200 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List and nearly 49,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In addition, last December I granted approval to the NTPF for the first tranche of funding in the region of €5m, for an initiative focused on those waiting longest for Daycase treatment with a view to ensuring that in excess of 2,000 patients waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure will have received an offer of an appointment for their procedure by the end of June. The NTPF has advised that to date over 2,500 patients files have been transferred to private hospitals under this initiative, 631 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that over 178 patients have received their procedure.

The inpatient/daycase Waiting List Action Plan will be delivered through a combination of normal hospital, National Service Plan-funded activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives using the €15m of Budget 2017. Under insourcing, initiatives to address orthopaedic and ophthalmology waiting lists will be progressed.

Medicinal Products Supply

1339. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when the drug Translarna will be made available to those persons for whom it is suitable as a treatment for Duchenne's muscular dystrophy. [28043/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Correspondence

1340. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28044/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have received the correspondence in question from the Clare Branch of Diabetes Ireland concerning issues relating to the care of patients

20 June 2017

with diabetes in the Counties Clare, Limerick and Galway. I will respond to the correspondence and as far as the service issues are concerned I am also referring the matter to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1341. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied). [28045/17]

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.

Patient Data

1342. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have accessed rehabilitation health care under the European Union cross-border health care directive in another European Union and European Economic Area member state in each year since Directive 2011/24/EU was transposed; the amount reimbursed in accordance with the legislation; the number of those persons which accessed health care in Northern Ireland; the amount reimbursed in respect of treatment in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28050/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Patient Data

1343. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the rehabilitative health services that have been sought by persons that have accessed health care under the European Union cross-border health care directive in another European Union and European Economic Area member state in each year since Directive 2011/24/EU was transposed; the most common rehabilitative services, treatments and procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28051/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Dental Services Data

1344. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the unit cost of hiring 100 nurses on an average nurses pay grade. [28052/17]

1346. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the unit cost of hiring ten dentists on an average dentists pay grade. [28054/17]

1347. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the unit cost of hiring ten orthodontists on an average orthodontists pay grade. [28055/17]

1348. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the unit cost of hiring ten dental nurses on an average dental nurses pay grade. [28056/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1344 and 1346 to 1348, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Ambulance Service Data

1345. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of private ambulances operating here; the hospital or hospital group they are working in conjunction with; and the amount spent on private ambulances by hospital or hospital group in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017 [28053/17]

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

Question Nos. 1346 to 1348 answered with Question No. 1344.

Question No. 1348 answered with Question No. 1344.

HSE Funding

1349. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to the request by a person (details supplied) for HSE funding to assist with third level studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28076/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the provision of personal assistants is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for consideration of the particular circumstances in this case and direct reply to the Deputy.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

1350. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an orthotics request by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28079/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Provision

1351. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the resources, including staffing levels, for the ambulance service in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28084/17]

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

Hospital Services

1352. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve the rate of admissions to stroke units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28085/17]

1353. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to improve inadequate levels of nursing staff, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, clinical nutritionists and speech and language therapists for stroke patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28086/17]

1355. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the cost of standardising thrombolysis services across the hospital network in every hospital treating stroke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28088/17]

1356. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will standardise thrombolysis services across the hospital network in every hospital treating stroke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28089/17]

1360. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospital community stroke liaison workers currently employed by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28093/17]

1361. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the entitlement of stroke survivors to rehabilitation services; his plans to develop a system to monitor and improve these services with set objectives and timeframes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28094/17]

1365. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of psychologists serving stroke patients here; his views on whether this is adequate to treat the often complex emotional and psychological impacts of stroke; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28098/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1352, 1353, 1355, 1356, 1360, 1361 and 1365 together.

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

Hospital Staff Data

1354. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of hospitals that have access to a medical social worker; the number of hospitals that have access to a neuropsychologist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28087/17]

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.

Questions Nos. 1355 and 1356 answered with Question No. 1352.

Hospitals Discharges

1357. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the success of the early supported discharge programme in the Galway region; his plans to roll this out further across rural areas of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28090/17]

1358. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the cost of rolling out early supported discharge programmes nationally for stroke patients in areas in which this would improve patient outcomes and free up acute hospital beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28091/17]

1359. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans for early supported discharge programmes nationally for stroke patients in view of the fact that this would improve patient outcomes and free up acute hospital beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28092/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1357 to 1359, inclusive, together.

As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Questions Nos. 1360 and 1361 answered with Question No. 1352.

Stroke Care

1362. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a situation in which persons with stroke living in nursing homes must pay for rehabilitation services privately or receive no services; if he will ensure that this practice no longer continues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28095/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Irish Public Health System provides for two categories of eligibility for persons ordinarily resident in the country, i.e. full eligibility (medical cardholders) and limited eligibility (all others). Full eligibility is determined mainly by reference to income limits. Determination of an individual's eligibility status is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive.

Persons with full eligibility are entitled to a range of services including general practitioner services, prescribed drugs and medicines, all in-patient public hospital services in public wards including consultants services, all out-patient public hospital services including consultants services, dental, ophthalmic and aural services and appliances and a maternity and infant care service. Other services such as allied health professional services may be available to medical card holders. With the exception of prescribed drugs and medicines, which are subject to a €2.50 charge per prescribed item (maximum of €25 month per month per individual/family), for those under 70 years, and €2 per item (maximum of €20 per month) to those over 70 years, these services are provided free of charge.

Persons with limited eligibility are eligible for in-patient and outpatient public hospital services including consultant services, subject to certain charges. The public hospital statutory in-patient charge is €80 in respect of each day during which a person is maintained, up to a maximum payment of €800 in any twelve consecutive months. There is also a charge of €100 for attendance at Accident & Emergency departments unless, inter alia, the person has a referral letter from their General Practitioner.

Stroke Care

1363. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons under 65 years of age account for one in every four strokes, yet home care packages are not tailored to the specific needs of persons that could be living with the side effects of strokes for decades; his plans to create an entitlement to homecare which is appropriate for stroke survivors of all ages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28096/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE's Home Care Package scheme aims to help people with medium-to-high support needs to continue to live at home independently. Home Care Packages consist of community services and supports which may be provided to assist a person, depending on their individual assessed care needs, to return home from hospital or residential care or to remain at home where mainstream or normal levels of services are insufficient.

The services provided in a Home Care Package may include nursing and therapies (for example - physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy), respite care and aids or appliances which may be relevant to the needs of stroke survivors. The services delivered are based upon the assessed client needs and the level of other supports already provided such as Home Help services.

Intensive Home Care Packages is a limited service which allows people who require a very high level of assistance to be discharged home from acute hospitals or avoid admission. They include supports over and above those provided as part of a standard Home Care Package or current community services.

The Department is currently developing policy proposals for the future financing and regulation of home care, including the Home Help Service and Home Care Packages. An important step in this process is a public consultation process which will be launched shortly. The purpose of this consultation is to allow all those who have views on this topic to have their say, including older people themselves, their families, and healthcare workers.

Stroke Care

1364. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fund a properly resourced stroke register, along with a rolling audit cycle incorporating acute, rehabilitation and community services every three years to ensure that service deficits are identified and addressed; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the stroke register receives no dedicated funding and operates in only two thirds of hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28097/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Stroke Audit (2016) acknowledged that the care of people with stroke in Ireland has improved since the HSE established its National Clinical Programme for Stroke in 2010. Stroke deaths have reduced by more than

15%, less stroke patients are discharged to nursing homes and more directly to home. More stroke units have opened since the commencement of the programme and emergency thrombolysis rates are amongst the best in Europe. Funding for developments are considered annually by the HSE for submission to the Department as part of the service planning process. The HSE has advised my Department that no funding request was made for the Stroke register in 2017 and that a request for dedicated funding for the Stroke Register will be considered as part of the Estimates process for 2018.

Question No. 1365 answered with Question No. 1352.

Medical Card Data

1366. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards issued to persons resident here, that qualify for same by virtue of the fact that their medical treatment services are paid for by the UK Government. [28103/17]

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

Health Care Reimbursement Agreements

1367. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid by the UK Government to the Exchequer annually for the past ten years to pay for medical services for UK social contributors that are resident here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28104/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ireland and the United Kingdom operate a bilateral healthcare reimbursement arrangement in respect of health services provided under EU Regulations, covering temporary visitors between the two countries, pensioners of one country and their dependants residing in the other country, and the dependant family members of persons employed in the other country. Under the arrangement net liability between the two countries is calculated on a lump sum basis rather than an individual basis. The amount payable in any one year is based on an estimate of the number of persons falling within categories eligible for reimbursement and for whom each country is liable and an estimate of the average cost of providing healthcare treatment. The amount payable is agreed following compilation of the necessary data and discussions between the two administrations. An initial payment on account is made for the relevant year and is subject to final settlement once all necessary statistical and financial information is complete. The finalisation of accounts is normally some years in arrears to facilitate collation of relevant statistics and for the approval of the average cost prepared by each country for the year concerned at EU level.

The amounts received from the United Kingdom in respect of reference years 2007 to 2016, attributable to UK pensioners and their dependents residing in Ireland, and to dependent family members residing in Ireland of persons employed and residing in the UK, are shown on the following table. Figures for reference years 2007 to 2011 represent final settled amounts while figures for reference years 2012 to 2016 represent initial payment on account.

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
€M	€M	€M	€M	€M	€M	€M	€M	€M	€M
320.8	318.6	317.8	336.2	326.7	243.2	211.2	198.4	180.0	180.5

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

1368. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the status of speech and language supports for a school (details supplied) in County Dublin; the reason the HSE has not made available supports for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28106/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1369. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [28119/17]

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

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

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

European Health Insurance Card

1370. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28130/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): EU Regulation 883/2004 provides for access to public health services on an emergency basis when an EU national visits another Member State on a temporary visit. The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is presented as evidence that the holder is entitled to receive necessary emergency treatment in the host Member State's public healthcare system on the same terms and at the same cost as nationals of the state concerned.

Bilateral arrangements between the UK and Ireland do not require the production of an EHIC for such public services to be provided, although it can of course be presented, and generally the production of proof of address by the patient is sufficient to permit access to the public

services.

In relation to this matter, my officials raised this with the UK authorities who confirmed that the clinic is an NHS clinic. Whilst it is not clear as to why this situation arose, the UK authorities did indicate that GP practices can only turn down an application to be temporarily registered with a GP for non-discriminatory reasons, such as if their lists are closed to new patients, the applicant lives outside the practice's boundary area or in other rare circumstances.

Postal Codes

1371. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form [28141/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This Department did not have any expenditure relating to designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system from 2011 to present.

Health Services Provision

1372. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28174/17]

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

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

Health Services

1373. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which he plans to focus on the known weaknesses within the health services with particular reference to addressing issues such as overcrowding at accident and emergency, waiting lists in respect of various procedures, deficiencies at community care level and bed and various staff shortages; the extent to which each or all are deemed to be responsible for delays experienced by persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28186/17]

1376. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which bed shortages have been identified as a contributory factor affecting persons requesting various procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28189/17]

1377. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which staff shortages at various levels continue to be identified as a contributory factor causing delays for

persons awaiting various procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28190/17]

1378. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which a lack of theatre space has been identified as a contributory factor in the ongoing delays experienced by persons on waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28191/17]

1384. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which his Department has identified the quantum of deficiencies within the health services which has resulted in delays and waiting lists at various levels; his plans to address such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28197/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1373, 1376 to 1378, inclusive, and 1384 together.

I am very aware of the interrelated nature of the challenges our health service faces. As a consequence, I have prioritised a range of policy and operational initiatives to address waiting lists, Emergency Department overcrowding, bed capacity and staff recruitment.

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. The HSE has published, and is implementing Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services, focused on longest-waiting patients.

In relation to Emergency Departments, the HSE is implementing a Roadmap towards improving patient ED experience and reducing trolley wait times. In addition, planning for next winter has commenced.

My Department has also commenced a capacity review, in line with the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment. The review will take a whole-of-system approach, and will examine key elements of primary and community care infrastructure, in addition to hospital facilities. Further, my Department and the HSE are implementing a range of initiatives to increase the medical and nursing workforce.

The Committee on the Future of Health Care has also made a series of recommendations, including specific measures to tackle waiting times and ED overcrowding. I look forward to considering the report and its recommendations in full.

Health Services Reports

1374. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the degree to which he has studied and will implement the recently published report on the future of the health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28187/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Supporting the establishment of the cross-party Committee on the Future of Healthcare in June 2016 was one of the first actions I took on becoming Minister for Health. The establishment of the Committee was supported across this House, demonstrating a shared understanding of the scale of the challenges facing our health services and recognition of the need for a fundamental re-shaping of our vision and long-term strategy for healthcare, based on cross-party consensus. I have supported this process from the outset, which I firmly believe has provided us with a once in a generation opportunity to transform our health services.

The Committee has lived up to its mandate and it is to be commended on the significant achievement of developing a future vision, based upon political consensus, for our health services. The report is the culmination of a year-long process of unprecedented cross-party collaboration, dialogue and engagement and is testament of the desire across the political spectrum and across the broader stakeholder community to work collaboratively to address the challenges in the health service.

I have been clear since the Committee commenced its work that I would not advance major structural reforms until it had reported out of respect for the process. I look forward to the upcoming Dáil debate on the report and will listen carefully to the views from across the Dáil. Following the debate, it is my intention to bring detailed analysis and proposals to Government.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Waiting Times

1375. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which he expects the treatment purchase scheme to address issues of delays experienced by persons awaiting various procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28188/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

There is no doubt that our public hospital system is challenged in meeting the growing demand for care. Last year alone, there was a 2% increase in inpatient and day-case activity over 2015.

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 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. The Inpatient / Daycase and Outpatient Plans which have now been published and are currently being implemented, focus on reducing as much as possible within existing resources the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or outpatient appointment by the end of October. The Scoliosis Action Plan aims to ensure that no patient who requires scoliosis surgery will be waiting more than four months for surgery by the end of 2017.

Under these Plans, since early February, over 14,200 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List, nearly 49,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List and 130 scoliosis surgeries have taken place.

In addition, the NTPF has advised that under the ongoing Daycase Waiting List Initiative over 2,500 patients files have been transferred to private hospitals under this Initiative, 631 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 178 patients have received their procedure.

Questions Nos. 1376 to 1378, inclusive, answered with Question No. 1373.

Medicinal Products Prices

1379. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which use of

the Single European Market can be identified as a means of alleviating the impact of persons faced with the high cost of experimental drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28192/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Each EU member state is responsible for the procurement of medicinal products. However, our membership of the single market offers an opportunity for international cooperation with other member countries to reduce the cost of new drugs.

In June 2016, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council adopted conclusions on strengthening the balance in the pharmaceutical systems in the EU and its member states. Those conclusions invited member states to explore opportunities for cooperation on pricing and reimbursement of medicines and to identify areas for cooperation which could contribute to affordability and better access to medicines. I have indicated my support for these measures and I welcome the opportunity for member states to cooperate by sharing information, so that we can achieve affordable and sustainable access to medicines.

I and my officials have been actively engaged with our European colleagues on the issue of drug pricing. In May I attended the third Round Table meeting for European Health Ministers and CEO's/Heads of Europe-based pharmaceutical companies in Malta, where I signed the Valetta Declaration.

The Declaration is in line with my objectives since coming into office to work with other countries to make medicines available to patients at affordable prices.

A technical committee to be established shortly, will explore the possible areas for cooperation including information sharing, horizon scanning and possible price negotiations and joint procurement.

I will continue to explore further opportunities to engage with Ministers from other EU countries on how to address the challenge of securing access to new medicines for citizens at an affordable price.

National Maternity Hospital Location

1380. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in 2017 regarding the finalisation of arrangements regarding the new maternity hospital at St Vincent's with particular reference to the protection of the public health and hospital interests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28193/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy will be aware that I recently asked for a period of time to reflect on, and address, issues associated with the National Maternity Hospital project. While work is continuing on these issues, I am happy to note the significant developments that have taken place over the period. I have met with the Chair and CEO/Master of both hospitals and reaffirmed my commitment to the project. In addition, there has been extensive engagement between the St Vincent's Healthcare Group and my officials.

On 29 May last, the Sisters of Charity announced their decision to relinquish their ownership and involvement with the St. Vincent's Healthcare Group. This decision, on the part of the Sisters, is an extremely significant development for the healthcare sector. My Department has been briefed on this development. The St. Vincent's Healthcare Group's Constitution will no longer refer to the Sisters of Charity and will be amended to reflect compliance with national and international best practice guidelines on medical ethics and the laws of the Republic of Ire-

land. I know that despite the specific provisions in the Mulvey agreement, there was a concern on the part of some, about the potential religious influence being brought to bear on the new maternity hospital. The decision of the Sisters of Charity is extremely helpful in dispelling any such concerns.

Discussions are continuing with the St. Vincent's Healthcare Group on the terms of the State's investment in the new hospital and, in particular, arrangements for the protection of this investment. The Mulvey agreement envisaged that further consideration was required in relation to the legal mechanisms necessary to protect the State's considerable investment. My Department is very actively engaged in devising suitable arrangements to ensure that the facilities are legally secured on an on-going basis for the delivery of publicly funded maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services.

I hope to update the Government on the project very shortly.

Primary Care Centres

1381. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which primary care in all regions, is likely to be reorganised in line with the increased demands and ready access to the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28194/17]

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

Primary Care Centres Data

1382. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres already provided and operational by county; the number proposed for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28195/17]

1385. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres already constructed and currently functioning throughout County Kildare; when the most recently constructed are likely to come on stream; the number and location of further proposed primary care centres throughout County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28198/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1382 and 1385 together.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Executive for direct reply.

Health Services Staff

1383. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which it is expected to ensure the retention of nursing, medical and consultant staff sufficient to meet the demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28196/17]

1387. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure the retention of adequate health personnel at all levels to meet all eventualities and eliminate overcrowding at acute hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28200/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1383 and 1387 together.

There has been a significant improvement in the staffing of the public health services in the past three years as the economic position has improved and additional funding has been made available to support service delivery. Total numbers employed have increased by from end April 2014 to end April 2017 by over 10,000 whole time equivalents (WTE's) to 111,979.

The number of consultants has increased significantly. At the end of April 2017 there were 2,884 whole time equivalents. This constitutes an increase of 298 (WTE's) since April 2014. The number of NCHDs has increased very significantly, from 4,982 at the end of April 2014 to 6,092 at the end of April 2017 (+1,109) in order to support service delivery and progression of EWTD compliance.

Nursing and midwifery numbers at the end of April 2017 stood at 36,549 whole time equivalents, having increased by 625 whole time equivalents in the 12 months from end April 2016 and by 1,870 in the three years from end April 2014 to end April 2017. Overall nursing numbers (WTEs) are at the highest level since 2011 with numbers increasing consistently since early in 2014. However the pace of increase is modest compared with the numbers graduating each year, the level of vacancies in the system and the fall in numbers between 2007 and 2014 due to the economic downturn.

Under proposals formulated at the WRC between this Department, DPER, the HSE, the INMO and SIPTU in February and March this year it was agreed that management would increase the nursing and midwifery workforce in 2017, through a broad range of initiatives that provide for 1,208 additional permanent posts. Delivery of these posts is possible through a combination of new development posts, for which additional funding is being provided in the current year, and the local conversion of agency employed staff into direct employees. Key measures include the conversion of agency employed staff into HSE direct employees and offering all graduating nurses and midwives full time contracts. Other important elements include enhanced maternity leave cover; a career break scheme; 130 additional undergraduate places in 2017; and offering nurses and midwives improved educational opportunities and career pathways. Recruitment measures include careers days, HSE attendance at national and international recruitment fairs, and a communication from the National Director for HR to all Nursing and Midwifery Graduates. A High Level Group with an independent chair has been established for the oversight of the implementation of this agreement, the first meeting of the Group was held on the 24th May 2017.

The recently concluded Public Service Stability Agreement provides for the Public Service Pay Commission carrying out a more comprehensive examination of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in those sectors and employment streams where difficulties are clearly evident. Parties to the Agreement will be able to make submissions to the Commission and the outcome of its assessment will be subject to discussions between the relevant parties.

Question No. 1384 answered with Question No. 1373.

Question No. 1385 answered with Question No. 1382.

General Practitioner Data

1386. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners practicing in County Kildare; the extent to which each practice is sufficiently supported to meet growing demands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28199/17]

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

Question No. 1387 answered with Question No. 1383.

Medicinal Products Prices

1388. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the procedures in place to encourage manufacturers of medicines to make their products available for sale to the health services at a manageable cost with particular reference to top of the range new products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28201/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines provides for a new and more robust process for the reimbursement of medicines offering greater certainty to manufacturers regarding the reimbursement process.

The revised process now requires that each product seeking reimbursement under the community drugs schemes will undergo an assessment process by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). As part of this process the manufacturer must submit the price at which it is seeking reimbursement for its product.

Under Clause 6.2.1 of the Framework Agreement the maximum supplier proposed price shall be no greater than the average of the currency-adjusted relevant price (being the ex-factory price or equivalent thereof and using the applicable exchange rate) applicable in such of the nominated states in which the medicine is available on the date of application. Under Clause 6.2.3 medicines are also subject to an annual price realignment so as to ensure that prices in Ireland fall in line with prices in other basket countries.

Once submitted to the NCPE the product will then be assessed in terms of its safety, clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness at the price submitted. The cost-effectiveness of the drug at the price submitted is factored into the NCPE's recommendation on whether or not the product should be reimbursed.

Following a recommendation from the NCPE, the HSE enters into negotiations with manufacturers, often seeking price reductions. The HSE frequently seeks to address what it may regard as excessive pricing demands around new medicines so as to bring those medicines within the range of affordability.

It is important to point out however that the HSE does not select the prices sought for patented medicines, that is determined by the pharmaceutical industry. Therefore I would urge all pharmaceutical companies to submit pricing proposals which are affordable and sustainable and which represent value for money for the Irish health service, patients and the taxpayer.

In May I attended the third Round Table meeting for European Health Ministers and CEO's/ Heads of Europe-based pharmaceutical companies in Malta, where I signed the Valetta Declaration.

The Declaration is in line with my objectives since coming into office to work with other

countries to make medicines available to patients at affordable prices.

A technical committee to be established shortly, will explore the possible areas for cooperation including information sharing, horizon scanning and possible price negotiations and joint procurement.

Hospital Appointments Status

1389. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28226/17]

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

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

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

Mental Health Services

1390. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he will address concerns raised by the mental health service providers concerning the facilities at a site (details supplied); the status of the programmes of renovations promised at the centre; if his attention has been drawn to sub-standard conditions at the site including bare floor boards throughout and no bathroom for staff with co located toilet and wash hand basin; when existing services will vacate the facilities as promised to allow for the mental health team to offer services; if he will provide the health and safety statement for the new premises including fire evacuation plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28236/17]

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.

Orthodontic Services Provision

1391. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will be issued with a date for an orthodontic appointment; the reason for the delay in issuing this appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28244/17]

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 be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Home Care Packages Provision

1392. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has received no home care or other help with their ADHD condition; and the help they can receive in the future. [28248/17]

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.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Policy

1393. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the deadline announced in February 2017 for the publication of an implementation plan for the national neuro-rehabilitation strategy by June 2017 will not now be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28260/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Health Service Executive (HSE) Social Care Division and the HSE Clinical Programme and Strategy Division are working in tandem to progress the implementation of the National Policy & Strategy for the provision of Neuro-rehabilitation Services in Ireland. This is in line with the commitment to publish an implementation plan as outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government and the commitment in the HSE National Service Plan 2017 and HSE Social Care Operational Plan for 2017.

I understand that the HSE has endeavoured to achieve an end of June 2017 timeline for the development and publication of an Implementation Plan. However, given the level of feedback received following a consultation process in 2016 and the need to enhance and expand the Implementation Framework to ensure engagement of the whole health system including acute hospital, post-acute and community level, it has not been possible to achieve this timeline. I un-

derstand that the HSE is committed to publishing an Implementation Plan as soon as possible.

The enhancement of the Implementation Framework will be completed by members of the National Working Group and overseen by the National Steering Group. I am happy to inform the Deputy that the National Steering Group, which is an oversight group with representatives from the HSE Reform Team - Disability Services, Acute Hospital Services, Primary Care, the Clinical Lead for the Rehabilitation Medicine Programme (Clinical Programme and Strategy) and the Clinical Lead for Social Care, has its first meeting scheduled for 4 July, 2017.

Full terms of reference for both the National Steering Group and National Working groups are in development, which will provide guidance on their roles and functions, to ensure that all members have clarity in terms of accountability and responsibilities.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

1394. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting on orthodontic procedures over three months, six months, one year and 18 months by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28275/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

1395. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to ease orthodontic waiting times for children in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28278/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1396. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28284/17]

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 Staff

1397. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if there are staff shortages in the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital. [28288/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Disabilities Assessments

1398. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delays experienced by a person (details supplied) who is awaiting an assessment of need since June 2016 and despite receiving assurances to the contrary from the Office of the Disability Appeals Officer that they would receive an assessment of need within three months of January 2017, they are now informed that they will not be assessed until New Year 2018. [28289/17]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

1399. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the delays and backlogs which exist under early years intervention within the Office of the Disability Appeals Officer by county, in tabular form; and the number of children that have been assured of a three month assessment following the complaints procedure [28290/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Disability Appeals Officer received 118 appeal applications in 2016 with 12 applications carried over from 2015. The new appeals received represent a three fold increase in the number of appeals received in 2015 (36 applications received). The majority of the appeals received relate to delays in the completion of the Assessment of Need process by the HSE.

Where this is the case and the appeal is upheld, the Disability Appeals Officer issues a letter of Determination. This letter includes a request that assessment of needs be commenced, if not already commenced, and any Final Assessment Report and Service Statement, should they be entitled to one, need to be completed and issued without further delay.

The following table outlines the number and location by County of appeal applications received in 2016.

COUNTY	NUMBER OF APPLICANTS
Cavan	6
Cork	76
Dublin	14

COUNTY	NUMBER OF APPLICANTS
Laois	2
Meath	1
Monaghan	2
Tipperary	5
Wexford	12

The number of Determinations made in 2016 amounted to 65 (11 of these were received in 2015). The number of appeals deemed invalid amounted to 11 (including 1 from 2015), the number withdrawn was 6 and the number of applications carried over into 2017 amounted to 48.

Ombudsman's Remit

1400. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the difficulty the Office of the Ombudsman has in pursuing certain complaints by ensuring that the office is no longer prevented from pursuing complaints against private nursing homes or the HSE in situations in which the action complained of relates solely to a clinical judgment decision. [28296/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The functions and powers of the Ombudsman are set out under the Ombudsman Act 1980, and responsibility for the Office of the Ombudsman comes under the aegis of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The Ombudsman published a report in 2015 entitled “Learning to Get Better - An investigation by the Ombudsman into how public hospitals handle complaints”. One of the recommendations in that report was “Consideration should be given on a wider front to amending the statutory complaints process (and the remit of the Ombudsman) to allow for the inclusion of clinical judgement as the subject about which a complaint can be made”. Under current legislation the Ombudsman cannot examine complaints which relate to a person acting on behalf of the HSE and which, in his opinion, relate solely to the exercise of clinical judgement in the diagnosis or care or treatment of a patient. However, the Ombudsman can examine the administrative actions of healthcare professionals and administrators taken in the course of clinical work which do not involve clinical judgement.

My Department's National Patient Safety Office is conducting a review of the statutory complaints process and this will include consideration of the recommendations in the Office for the Ombudsman Report of 2015. The review will also examine how the HSE examines complaints in accordance with its obligations under Part 9 of the Health Act 2004. The public consultation phase of this review is now underway and concludes on 22nd June 2017. It is open to the public, patients, users, staff and relevant organisations as an online questionnaire on the Department of Health website.

Brexit Issues

1401. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the Government's contribution to the human milk bank in Northern Ireland. [28299/17]

1402. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans in the event of a hard Brexit to access breastmilk for sick infants and babies that are born premature that depend on the breastmilk. [28300/17]

1403. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of babies that are born with necrotizing enterocolitis and received breastmilk from the human milk bank in Northern Ireland. [28301/17]

1404. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of babies that are born prematurely and received breastmilk from the human milk bank in Northern Ireland. [28302/17]

1405. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans for building a human milk bank here in order that infants can be protected in the event of Brexit. [28303/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1401 to 1405, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 1406 to 1422 inclusive, answered with Question No. 1000.

National Maternity Strategy

1423. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the steps which will be taken to guarantee the first 24 to 48 hours of skin to skin contact between mother and infant for the benefit for infants. [28322/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ireland's first National Maternity Strategy - Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026 - was published in January 2016. It proposes an integrated model of care with three new care pathways - supported, assisted and specialised. The Strategy provides that all care pathways should support the normalisation of pregnancy and birth. It also provides that all women should benefit from best practice to support the initiation of breastfeeding and promote bonding of mother and baby, such as skin to skin contact, immediately after birth.

Implementation of the Strategy will be led by the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme. The Programme is currently working on a detailed action plan for the phased implementation of the Strategy. I expect that this plan will be submitted to my Department by the end of June.

Questions Nos. 1424 to 1426, inclusive, answered with Question No. 1000.

Hospital Appointments Status

1427. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appoint-

ment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28328/17]

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

1428. **Deputy Seán Haughey** 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. [28329/17]

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.

Medical Card Reviews

1429. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the grounds upon which a full medical card was not renewed in the case of a person (details supplied) whose circumstances have not changed since initial processing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28332/17]

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

Home Care Packages Data

1430. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons supported by home help and home care packages in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date

in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28338/17]

1431. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the proportion of the population 65 years of age and over receiving home care as recommended by the OECD international standards; the details in respect of each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28339/17]

1432. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the number of delayed discharges as a result of delayed access to community supports, including home help and home care packages in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28340/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1430 to 1432, inclusive, together.

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

1433. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28345/17]

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 Waiting Lists

1434. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the likely waiting period for a cardiac procedure in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28385/17]

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 Complaints Procedures

1435. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a hospital complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28389/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): At the outset I would like to sympathise with the patient in relation to their hospital experience which sounds extremely distressing for the patient and the family.

My Department received this patient query earlier this month and has responded directly to the individual advising her that her correspondence has been referred to the HSE National Advocacy Unit in the Quality & Patient Safety Directorate, Oak House Millennium Park Naas Co Kildare. The HSE will follow up on the matter with the hospital concerned and a reply will be sent directly to the individual.

You may wish to know that there are processes in place for any individual who wishes to raise a concern regarding their treatment in our health service. With regard to specific complaints in relation to experiences of individuals in our hospitals, there is a formal complaints policy, entitled "*Your Service Your Say*", details of which are on the HSE website, at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/yourhealthservice/feedback/complaints/>.

In accordance with this procedure, a complaint must be made in the first instance to the hospital in which the incident causing the complaint occurred. If the individual not satisfied with the response from the hospital, a review can be sought from the HSE Director of Advocacy and the Ombudsman, whose details are set out below.

HSE Director of Advocacy

Oak House

Millennium Park

Naas

Co Kildare

Tel 1890 424 555.

Office of the Ombudsman

18, Lower Leeson Street

Dublin 2

Tel 1890 223 030

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie.

I hope this is of assistance to you.

1436. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the posts that have become vacant in a group (details supplied) in occupational therapy, physiotherapy and public health nurses in the past three years; the posts which have been filled; the date on which they were filled; the posts which have not been filled; the reason for same; the vacant posts that no longer exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28391/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Discharges

1437. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of delayed discharges per hospital. [28407/17]

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.

HSE Investigations

1438. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the HSE to provide an update on the status of an investigation into a person (details supplied) who was employed as a psychologist by the south eastern health board in 1995; if the attention of the health board was drawn to the allegations of abuse against this person at the time of their employment; if references were sought from their previous employer in the United States of America before their employment in County Wexford commenced; if their private psychology practice in County Wexford was monitored by the south eastern health board; the nature of the concerns raised with the south eastern health board by the Diocese of Ferns between 1996 and 1998; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28409/17]

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.

National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan

1439. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will address concerns regarding the rollout of the progressing disabilities programme in CHO 9 (details supplied); if service levels will not be further degraded as part of this roll out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28412/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

1440. **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. [28413/17]

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.

Food Imports

1441. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which traceability and country of origin labelling continues in respect of all food and food products imported, including imports from third countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28433/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Since 1999, responsibility for the enforcement of food legislation is vested in the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). The Authority co-ordinates the work of its official agencies through service contracts which specify the food sectors to be supervised, the types of controls to be provided, including inspections and laboratory analysis. The main official agencies under contract to the FSAI are the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Local Authorities and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority.

The system of official controls includes checks on all imported foods, including compliance with traceability and country of origin labelling requirements. Imports of food of animal origin are the subject of specific authorisations before they can be placed on the market in Ireland or the EU for which controls at import are carried out by DAFM. Imports of foods of non-animal origin are subject to compliance with all relevant EU rules for which controls at import are carried out by the HSE.

Primary responsibility for compliance with food law rests with the food business operator (FBO). Traceability as a legal obligation for every FBO was introduced in 2002 by Regulation EC No. 178/2002 on the general principles of food law.

Each FBO must be able to identify from whom they have been supplied with a food or any substance intended to be, or expected to be, incorporated into a food. They must also have in place systems and procedures to identify the other businesses to which their products have been supplied. This information shall be made available to the competent authorities on demand. In addition, foods of animal origin must come from approved premises and the identity number of that premises within and outside the EU must be indicated.

The general rules on traceability have been augmented since 2002, with additional require-

ments being introduced for specific foods. For instance under European Parliament and Council Reg. 1760/2000, all fresh, frozen or minced beef marketed in the EU (with the exception of offal) is subject to a mandatory system of origin traceability and origin labelling under the remit of DAFM. There are two elements to the beef labelling regime which apply to all parts of the supply chain namely a compulsory system, which requires FBOs to label their beef products with certain prescribed information, the country of the slaughterhouse and approval number, the country of the cutting hall and approval number and the origin of the beef. This information must be present up to and including the point of sale to the consumer. A voluntary system covers any other labelling claim that processors or retailers wish to make concerning the origin, characteristics or production methods of the beef they supply.

In 2011, the European Union passed a new Regulation on Food Information for the Consumers (FIC Regulation No.1169/2011) which updates the requirements for consumer information and labelling in a number of areas, including in relation to country of origin labelling (COOL). In general, under this rule, information provided with food must not be misleading as to, inter alia, its country of origin or place of provenance.

Commission Regulation No. 1337/2013 introduced mandatory origin labelling for meat from pigs, poultry, sheep and goats from 1st April 2015. This Implementing Regulation provides for mandatory labelling by the Member State or third country of rearing and slaughter for these meats. There are also specific rules applying to fish whereby information on the catchment area and species must be provided.

DAFM is planning to extend origin labelling rules to non-prepacked meat products via national measures. A DAFM Working Group, with membership drawn from the Department of Health, the FSAI and the HSE, is currently considering the introduction of a Statutory Instrument to bring the labelling of loose pig meat and poultry meat into line with the origin labelling rules for packaged meat brought in on April 1st 2015. This will require businesses who sell meat loose in their premises to clearly identify the country of rearing and slaughter of the animal from which the meat is derived.

The empowerment to adopt national measures is being facilitated by the Department of Health through Section 54(1)(d) of the Health Act 1947 as DAFM does not have such empowering legislation.

HIQA Inspections

1442. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if he has satisfied himself that HIQA has enough powers under existing legislation to deal with allegations of abuse by staff of residents in nursing homes; if he will end the practice of announcing inspections by HIQA in advance; his views on whether cameras should be installed in nursing homes where appropriate; if criminal proceedings can be taken against staff that may engage in such activities; if he has further satisfied himself that there is transparency and accountability regarding nursing homes generally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28474/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement and to monitor safety and quality in Ireland's health and personal social care services. Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private have been registered and inspected by HIQA.

Nursing home operators must ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to protect resi-

dents from all forms of abuse. These measures include;

- Staff training in relation to the detection and prevention of and responses to abuse.
- Any incident or allegation of abuse must be investigated and operators must have policies and procedures in place for the prevention, detection and response to abuse.
- Furthermore, providers must notify HIQA of any allegation of abuse or serious adverse incidents that occur in a nursing home.

HIQA's programme of both scheduled and unannounced inspections helps to ensure that standards are maintained and where issues of non-compliance arise, that these are addressed and rectified. If a nursing home is found not to be in compliance with the Regulations it may either fail to achieve or lose its registration status. HIQA also has wide discretion in deciding whether to impose conditions of registration on nursing homes.

Images of people captured by closed circuit television (CCTV) are personal data and the processing of such images is covered by the Data Protection legislation. The National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People provides that “ *Where closed circuit television (CCTV) systems are used to protect the safety and security of residents, they do not intrude on privacy and there is a policy on the use of CCTV which is informed by relevant legislation.* ”

As regulator, HIQA's remit operates at level of facilities rather than of individual complaints. However, HIQA takes into account and uses all information received to inform and plan its regulatory activity. The Authority has and will continue to report any potential criminal act identified during monitoring and inspection to An Garda. Once finalised, HIQA inspection reports are published on the Authority's website www.hiqa.ie.

Suicide Prevention

1443. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health his plans to work with the National Office of Suicide Prevention to provide age appropriate suicide prevention and awareness training to persons under 16 years of age such as SafeTalk and ASIST. [28475/17]

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

1444. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will receive an appointment for cataract surgery. [28488/17]

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.

Protection of Life During Pregnancy Reviews

1445. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of terminations per year carried out under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28489/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, under Section 20 of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013, an annual report on notifications under the Act must be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas each year. Two such annual reports have been published to date and are available on the Department of Health website.

The Annual Report for 2014, covering the period from 1 January 2014 until 31 December 2014, shows that twenty-six medical procedures were carried out under the Act. Of these fourteen arose from a risk of physical illness, three arose from a risk from suicide, and nine from emergencies arising from physical illness.

The second Annual Report, covering the period from 1 January 2015 until 31 December 2015, shows that twenty-six medical procedures were also carried out in 2015 under the Act. Again, fourteen arose from a risk of physical illness, three arose from a risk from suicide, and nine from emergencies arising from physical illness.

The number reported each year to date (twenty-six) is in line with annual national estimates presented to the Joint Oireachtas Committee hearings on the General Scheme of the Act in January 2013.

The third Annual Report, covering the period 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016, will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on or before 30 June this year. The data it covers will not be available before that time.

Health Services Provision

1446. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the therapy requirements of persons (details supplied) will be assessed and organised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28490/17]

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

Disability Services Provision

1447. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the use of a block resource allocation model for the provision of children's disability services; the way in which this model adjusts to increased demands year on year for services; his views on whether this model is leading to unacceptable delays in the ability of children to access disability services, such as a centre (details supplied) in Dublin; if he will request the HSE to deploy a demand led model of resource allocation for children's disability services which reflects the level of demand and unmet needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28491/17]

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.

Disability Services Funding

1448. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health further to correspondence dated 19 June 2015 issued by the HSE to the parents of a person (details supplied) who used a training centre in County Donegal, the amount of funding referred to that was provided to support the person; the details of the funding for each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 that has been allocated to the centre to provide the necessary supports to the person; if moneys from the funding are still being provided to the centre despite the person having withdrawn from the centre; if not, the date on which funding stopped being paid to the centre for the provision of these supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28493/17]

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.

Dental Services Provision

1449. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a dental appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28494/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1450. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a date for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28497/17]

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 be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

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

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

Health Services Staff Recruitment

1451. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recruit 30 extra staff for the next three years in CHO 9 in an effort to ensure the delivery of the progressing disability services for children and young people programme for this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28521/17]

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

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

1452. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) further to previous correspondence with his office; if they will be granted access to attend an occupational therapist in a centre rather than waiting 21 months to see a therapist on the Navan Road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28522/17]

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.

Protection of Life During Pregnancy Reviews

1453. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if there is a mechanism within his Department to measure the physical and mental health outcomes of those that access services under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013, for those that proceed with an abortion and for those that do not; and if so, if he will make the findings of this research available publicly in an anonymous fashion. [28537/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It is not appropriate for the Department of Health to be involved in individual medical cases.

As the Deputy will be aware, the purpose of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 is to confer procedural rights on a woman who believes she has a life threatening condition, so she can have certainty as to whether she requires a termination of pregnancy to avert a real and substantial risk to her life.

Medical procedures carried out under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 are subject to strict patient confidentiality, in line with guidance on confidentiality in medical practice as set out in the current Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics For Registered Medical Practitioners. While section 20 of the Act requires that the Minister for Health be notified of each termination of pregnancy no later than 28 days after it has taken place, reports under the Act are anonymised so as to protect women who have had terminations and their medical practitioners.

Services for People with Disabilities

1454. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to making funding available to establish a separate unit for young persons at an existing facility (details supplied) in County Donegal to enable such persons with more severe disabilities to attend its day care service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28542/17]

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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

1455. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if financial assistance can be given towards the purchase of a wheelchair in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28546/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Reports

1456. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if a copy of the Galway Roscommon ASD service review commissioned by the Chief Officer CHO 2, HSE West can be provided; the status of each of the recommendations therein; the extent to which each recommendation has been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28560/17]

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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

1457. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Galway for ASD services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28562/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

1458. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the change in the type two diabetic test strips reimbursement. [28602/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Facilities

1459. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the dedicated obstetrics theatre sanctioned for Kerry University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28609/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, as this is

a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Facilities

1460. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of a new full medical testing facility coupled with updated equipment for Kerry University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28610/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Facilities

1461. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of the colocation of the intensive care unit, the coronary care unit and the high dependency unit at Kerry University Hospital, in view of the fact that a new medical testing facility has been endorsed for the hospital and these units should be located next to this facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28611/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1462. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason glucose reading sensors (details supplied) are not included in the long term illness book; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28621/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Administration

1463. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28628/17]

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 Admissions

1464. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if persons that were previously cared for at St Vincent's hospital Athlone have been able to return to the hospital. [28637/17]

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.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

1465. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the hiring of a clinical specialist radiographer at Mullingar Regional Hospital; and if this will immediately lead to the provision of a 20 week anomaly scan for all expectant mothers attending the hospital [28639/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Home Care Packages

1466. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether there would be a detrimental impact on the home care package of a person (details supplied) which they are receiving if their parents were to apply for and receive the respite care grant. [28657/17]

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.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1467. **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. [28658/17]

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

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

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

State Bodies Code of Conduct

1468. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28671/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the terms of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, all State Bodies under my aegis are required to furnish a report each year confirming their compliance with all elements of the Code including their compliance with tax laws.

The HSE as a State Body has incorporated taxation into its National Financial Regulations as they apply to tax. These represent the high level framework within which the internal financial control system of the HSE operates. The HSE performs an annual detailed self-review of tax compliance, which is managed by a dedicated inhouse tax team working with external tax advisors. The HSE confirmed that it has complied with its obligations under tax law other than as disclosed in the Statement of Internal Financial Control and Note 25 of the Annual Financial Statements 2016. The Annual Report and Financial Statements of the HSE were submitted to me on 1 June, 2017 and laid before the Oireachtas on 2nd June and were subject to the review of the Public Accounts Committee on 15th June 2017.

All other State Bodies under my aegis have confirmed that they were in compliance with the tax law requirements in the Code in their annual compliance statements for 2015. My officials have not yet received all reports for 2016, but all that have made returns have confirmed compliance with the Code.

Hospital Procedures

1469. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the number of days per year full capacity protocol has been implemented at University Hospital Galway in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28681/17]

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.

HSE Staff Recruitment

1470. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a report on the high volume recruitment online application system procured by the HSE's national recruitment service in Manorhamilton in 2016; the details of all services provided under the contract; the costs associated with each service (details supplied); the number of additional staff employed and promoted by the national recruitment service to conduct this high volume recruitment project; and if all of these staff members have been appropriately assigned to the project. [28683/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Mental Health Services

1471. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 434 of 9 May 2017, the reason Portlaoise Prison is excluded from this information. [28688/17]

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

1472. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the Central Mental Hospital waiting list on 12 June 2017; the length of time each person has been on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28690/17]

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

Health Services Data

1473. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of employing a social care worker. [28704/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Health Care Professionals

1474. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Health the regulations in place regarding the provision of professional care for the elderly; and the way it is vetted. [28711/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The Health Information and Quality Authority is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement and to monitor safety and quality in Ireland's health and personal social care services. Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private have been registered and inspected by HIQA.

This responsibility is underpinned by a comprehensive framework, including the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 (as amended), and new National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People which were approved in 2016.

The Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 provide that the person in charge and each member of staff have a vetting disclosure in accordance with the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act, 2012.

Primary legislation and resources will be required for the introduction of a statutory regulation system for home care services. However, the HSE has already progressed a range of measures to improve its Home Care provision overall. A Procurement Framework for Home

Care Services came into effect in mid-2012. This framework, which requires service providers to meet defined minimum standards applies to services procured by the HSE from external providers and the process was most recently repeated in 2016. Providers of home care services are monitored through Service Level Agreements with the HSE. They are required to provide a prescribed range of information in relation to the services they provide, and are supervised through regular local operational meetings and reviews of clients' care plans. The purpose of these measures is to promote quality and safety and to ensure a more standardised approach to service provision nationally. Home Care Services are reviewed regularly by the HSE. In addition, the HSE has in place a complaints procedure that is available to all service users.

The Department is currently engaged in a detailed process to determine what type of home care scheme is best for Ireland. This process will consider the future design of both the funding and regulation systems for these crucial services.

As an initial step, the Department commissioned the Health Research Board to undertake an evidence review of the home care systems that are in place in four other European countries. This review was published on 11 April. The Review will help us to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions and will inform the debate and future consideration of approaches to formal home care financing and regulation here in Ireland.

Another important step in this process is a public consultation process which I will be launching shortly. The purpose of this consultation is to allow all those who have views on this topic to have their say, including older people themselves, their families, and healthcare workers. The Department wants to find out what people think about current home care services and would also like to hear the public's views on what the future scheme should look like. I strongly urge all those with an interest in home care services to make a submission to the consultation.

Health Services Provision

1475. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28712/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1476. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons currently waiting for an appointment for orthopaedic treatment in Louth County Hospital; and the number of these persons that have been waiting three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months. [28714/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The NTPF publishes waiting list data by speciality, hospital and hospital group each month. This data can be viewed on its website at NTPF.ie.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1477. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if a new initiative has been implemented in Louth County Hospital to manage waiting times in respect of orthopaedic treat-

ment; when this initiative commenced; the additional resources, staff and funding that have been put in place to roll this out; and the way this initiative will work for patients currently awaiting treatment. [28715/17]

1478. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if the new initiative in place in Louth County Hospital will only be in place for orthopaedic treatments; if not, the other treatments that will be referred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28716/17]

1479. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the criteria applied when referring persons to the new initiative in place in Louth County Hospital awaiting orthopaedic treatments; the pathways persons are referred; if persons that are currently awaiting orthopaedic treatment will be referred to this new initiative and will then lose their place on the original waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28717/17]

1480. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the new initiative in place in respect of orthopaedic treatments in Louth county hospital to other hospitals; and if so, the hospitals to which. [28718/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1477 to 1480, inclusive, together.

The HSE has advised that the Physiotherapy Orthopaedic Triage Initiative has been in operation in Louth County Hospital since 2010. This is a nationally and internationally approved approach to managing Orthopaedic referrals to assist with management of waiting lists for Orthopaedic patients.

A staffing compliment of 0.8 wte Senior Physiotherapist was put in place to implement this initiative involving the triaging of appropriate patients to Physiotherapy for assessment and possibly further progression of treatment of their condition. The triage process is overseen by an Orthopaedic Consultant who assesses and grades all referrals in terms of Consultant or Physiotherapist triage.

A letter is then issued to the patient explaining the triage option informing them that a triage physiotherapy assessment may be of use as a treatment option. The outcome of the physiotherapy triage is discussed and reviewed by the Orthopaedic Consultant and Physiotherapist and physiotherapy treatment may be the proposed treatment option for the patient.

Other investigations such as Xray, CT and MRI scans or further diagnostic tests may also be considered and surgery may also be an option. In summary, the clinical decision regarding treatment options is always made by an Orthopaedic Consultant

The Orthopaedic Physiotherapy Triage Initiative is dedicated for Orthopaedic patients and it is planned to continue this service going forward. The Consultant Outpatient service is also available for referrals.

The criteria for referral to the Physiotherapy Orthopaedic Triage Initiative is a clinical decision made by the Orthopaedic Consultant. This Initiative may refer patients for intensive physio, an exercise programme, falls programme, 'back school', relaxation therapy or referral to primary care. Consultant-led service may involve surgery, injection therapy or oral medication. If required, patients referred to this initiative maintain their original place on the Consultant Orthopaedic waiting list which is managed by chronological booking.

Question No. 1481 answered with Question No. 1060.

Health Strategies

1482. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendation 3.1 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010 to 2019 regarding meeting the 10 year targets; the way in which the targets in respect of healthy body weight, healthy eating physical activity, salt consumption, smoking reduction and alcohol consumption have been met; if they will be achieved by 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28736/17]

1483. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendation 3.2 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010 to 2019; if actions on this are reported to the Cabinet committee on health; if so, the frequency with which; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28737/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1482 and 1483 together.

Progress on the recommendations which relate to an increased emphasis on prevention, promotion of health-enhancing behaviours and an intersectoral approach to tackling the determinants of health (Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2), are now comprehended within the implementation of Healthy Ireland - A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being (2013-2025).

The Healthy Ireland Framework is based on evidence and experience from around the world which clearly shows that the creation of positive changes in health and well-being takes the involvement of the whole of Government and all of society working in unison. It describes four high-level goals and a number of action areas to increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life, reduce health inequalities, protect the public from threats to their health and well-being, and to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

The implementation of Healthy Ireland is overseen by the cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform which is chaired by An Taoiseach.

Since Healthy Ireland was launched in March 2013, a number of core policies and strategies have been published which deal more specifically with the factors relevant to preventing cardiovascular disease, and which include a more specific range of intersectoral actions as well as targets for improved population health. These are in particular the Tobacco Free Ireland Policy (published in 2013), Get Ireland Active! - National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland (published 2016) and A Healthy Weight for Ireland - Obesity Policy and Action Plan (published 2016). In addition, the National Substance Misuse Strategy (published 2012) sets out the policy approach to deal with the use and misuse of alcohol with the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill a key deliverable from that Strategy.

Building relationships and strengthening partnerships is a key focus of the implementation of Healthy Ireland - with other Government Departments, Local Authorities, the education sector, and with the wider business, voluntary and community sectors. Structures supporting the work include a Cross Sectorial Group comprising senior officials from Government Departments and key agencies; and a Healthy Ireland Council comprising representation from a wide range of stakeholder sectors.

Health Strategies

1484. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recom-

mentation 4.1 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010 to 2019; the media and education campaigns which have been undertaken since the publication of the policy; the number of same; if he will provide details of the interim evaluations of these campaigns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28738/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Strategies

1485. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 4.2 and 4.3 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010 to 2019 in respect of the 2007 ESC clinical practice guidelines; the protocols on best practice on cardiovascular clinical care which were agreed; the availability of targeted individual assessment and management of cardiovascular disease in primary care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28739/17]

1486. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 4.4 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of a structured programme for cardiovascular risk ascertainment and management in the primary care setting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28740/17]

1487. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 4.5 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of a protocol for the early detection and structured cardiovascular care of persons with diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28741/17]

1488. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 4.6 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of effective management of hypertension in the primary care setting; if systems for blood pressure assessment, management and review will be considered as part of the new general practitioner contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28742/17]

1489. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 4.7 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of an anticoagulation service management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28743/17]

1490. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 4.8 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of increasing the support and capacity of primary care to detect heart failure at an early stage and to provide proactive care; if he will provide an update on each of the eight aspects of care included in the recommendation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28744/17]

1491. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 4.9 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of the development of a protocol for risk assessment and management of persons with suspected peripheral arterial disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28745/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1485 to 1491, inclusive, together.

As these matters relate to the provision of primary care services for cardiovascular disease they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1506. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 5.17 and 5.18 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the way the development of stroke units is progressing; if this has been prioritised in the hospital reconfiguration programme; his views on the levels of adequate and appropriate staffing in stroke units; the way deficits are being addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28761/17]

1507. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.19 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the status of the availability of emergency stroke treatment by a consultant stroke physician on a 24/7 basis; the way the emergency treatment has been developed; the issues outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28762/17]

1508. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 5.19 and 5.20 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the status of the availability of emergency stroke treatment by a consultant stroke physician on a 24/7 basis; the way the emergency treatment has been developed; the issues outstanding; the models of service delivery developed; the protocols and pathways identified, implemented and reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28763/17]

1509. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.21 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28764/17]

1510. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.22 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the status of the availability of full needs assessments prior to admission to hospital, aiming to support discharge home or to a place of residence; if placement in long term care is currently being undertaken as a result of inadequate community services and facilities, in addition to home care packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28765/17]

1511. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.23 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the availability of access to consultant led, same day, rapid access TIA and stroke prevention clinics with appropriate diagnostic and management facilities; if clear pathways of referral and use of risk stratification are in use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28766/17]

1512. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.24 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of clinical management of carotid disease and organisational management at stroke network level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28767/17]

1513. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.25 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 in respect of the organisation of specialist stroke services into population based stroke networks; the status and progress of the plan for service reconfiguration to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28768/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1506 to 1513, inclusive, together.

As the matters raised by the Deputy relate to the provision of stroke services they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply.

Health Strategies

1514. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.26 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019 in respect of the recommendations of the task force on sudden cardiac death; the status of the initiatives identified in the policy seen as having highest priority within the new network structures; the progress to date on achieving these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28769/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply the Deputy.

Health Strategies

1515. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.27 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; the number of public education campaigns which have been undertaken to raise awareness of acute cardiovascular events since the publication of the policy; the extent of the delivery of basic life support training in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28770/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this matter relates to public education campaigns raising awareness of acute cardiovascular events it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Strategies

1516. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; if adequate and equitable coverage of cardiac rehabilitation for all eligible patients exists; the deficits in staffing and facilities that exist; the costs of addressing this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28771/17]

1517. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28772/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1516 and 1517 together.

As these matters relate to the provision of cardiac rehabilitation services they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Strategies

1518. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 6.7 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; the availability of multidisciplinary assessments of rehabilitation needs within five working days of admission for stroke; if service

plans are then commenced; if these services are available across all hospitals and hospital networks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28773/17]

1519. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 6.8 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; the availability of resources and systems to support early supported discharge for patients with stroke; the deficits in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28774/17]

1520. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 6.9 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010 to 2019; the details of partnership frameworks developed between the HSE and the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28775/17]

1521. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 6.10 and 6.11 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28776/17]

1522. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 6.12, 6.13 and 6.14 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28777/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1518 to 1522, inclusive, together.

As these matters relate to the provision of stroke rehabilitation services they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Strategies

1523. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 6.15, 6.16, 6.17 and 6.18 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28778/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Strategies

1524. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 7.1 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28779/17]

1525. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 7.2 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28780/17]

1526. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 7.3 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28781/17]

1527. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 7.4 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [28782/17]

1528. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 7.5 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28783/17]

1529. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 7.6 of the national cardiovascular health policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28784/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1524 to 1529, inclusive, together.

As these matters relate to staffing and human resources they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1530. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.1 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the detail of evidence based guidelines and standards that have been agreed; the detail of performance indicators and reporting structures that have been established; the way these have been met to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28785/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The cardiovascular policy acknowledged the role of evidence based guidelines in the development of services. The policy itself recommended the adoption of the 2007 ESC Clinical Practice Guidelines which have now been updated and revised. International evidence was also used in relation to the provision of acute hospital services for cardiovascular disease.

In relation to the broader issues of guidelines and standards, clinical effectiveness is considered as a key component of patient safety and quality. Clinical effectiveness incorporates the utilisation of quality assured National Clinical Guidelines, National Clinical Audit and general clinical practice guidance. This is a quality improvement approach which promotes cost-effective healthcare that is evidence-based with subsequent improved clinical decision making and clinical outcomes.

The Irish clinical effectiveness agenda is led by the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) which is a Ministerial committee of key stakeholders including patients. Its role is to prioritise and quality assure to the level of international methodological standards a suite of National Clinical Guidelines and National Clinical Audit, prioritised, as significant for the Irish healthcare system. National Clinical Audit and National Clinical Guidelines, quality assured and recommended by NCEC for implementation in the Irish health system provide robust evidence-based approaches to underpin or define systems of service or models of care as appropriate. They assist in developing and monitoring the improvement and standardisation of service delivery. Since 2013, the NCEC has published 14 National Clinical Guidelines in the areas of clinical deterioration, cancer and palliative care, hospital acquired infections and chronic diseases. A further 14 are in development as new or updates of existing guidelines. The National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC) prioritised and quality assured its first national clinical audit the *Major Trauma Audit*, which the Minister launched in December 2016. The NCEC, in November 2015, published the Standards for Clinical Practice Guidance setting out the standards for development of clinical guidance such as policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines. This has been followed by the HSE's Framework for utilisation of these NCEC

Standards.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1531. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.2 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the progress to date on developing a comprehensive cardiovascular health services information system; the detail of systematic data collection methods and analytic standards; if coordinated collation, analysis and evaluation of data has been ensured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28786/17]

1532. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.3 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28787/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1531 and 1532 together.

As these matters relate to patient information issues they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1533. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.4 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the detail of the national adult and child surveys conducted to date to establish health profiles in adults and children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28788/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Regarding recommendation 8.4 of the cardiovascular policy, a new annual Healthy Ireland Survey commenced in 2014 to enhance data collection and monitoring capacity to track progress in achieving targets to evaluate the success of Healthy Ireland. The Survey provides an up to date picture of the nation's health with a robust and credible baseline set of data on a range of health behaviours, including those relevant to cardiovascular health. The Department is now in a position to report credibly on a range of issues which have a significant impact on health outcomes, as well as being able to provide reliable and current data to fulfil a number of international reporting requirements. The first Healthy Ireland Survey was published in 2015, a second in 2016 and the work on a third wave is well advanced with publication expected in October 2017.

These data are now being used to inform current and future policy direction, programme development and implementation.

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey is a WHO (European) collaborative study. Participating countries cooperate on survey content, methodology and time, and an international protocol is developed. The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Trends Report explores the trends in the health and wellbeing of children in Ireland between 1998 and 2014. The study has been collecting data from school-aged children aged 10-17 years since 1998. The most recent data collection took place in 2014. Previous studies were undertaken in 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010.

The Trends Report describes the self-reported health status of children over time in relation to key indicators: health behaviours, health outcomes and the contexts of their lives.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1534. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.5 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; the number of audits which have taken place of cardiovascular networks to assess volume and quality of service delivery; the way these have aided in service planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28789/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1535. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.6 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28790/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Since the publication of the Cardiovascular Policy in 2010, an e-Health strategy was approved by Government in 2013 and a Knowledge and Information Strategy was published by Health Service Executive in 2015. A number of strategic e-health programmes are being progressed including the Individual Health Identifier and the development of business case for a national Electronic Healthcare Record.

The Health Identifiers Bill was published in 2013 and enacted in 2014. Since enactment, necessary follow-up legislative measures under the Act have been taken, as required, to facilitate the practical and phased implementation of the Health Identifier Project. The latest of these measures was the introduction of further commencement provisions and the making of Regulations, at the end of May, allowing for accessing the register of individual health identifiers and the initial deployment of health identifiers in the regulated manner envisaged in the Act.

A revised and expanded General Scheme of a Health Information and Patient Safety Bill was approved by Government in November 2015 and published on the Department's website. That legislation was the subject of further Pre-Legislative Scrutiny, in December 2016, by the Oireachtas Committee on Health. The Committee has now forwarded its report to the Minister and the Department is currently considering the points raised by the Committee so as to respond fully.

National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019

1536. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 8.7 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019 on the establishment of a national group representative of stakeholders to determine priorities for research and health technology in cardiovascular care; the frequency with which this group has met since the publication of the policy; the outcomes and recommendations from this group, in addition to current projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28791/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Research Board, in line with the recommendation, coordinates the priorities for research in conjunction with key stakeholders such as academics, service providers and policy makers.

In relation to the research being carried out in conjunction with the Health Research Board,

the Board has supported a number of awards conducting research into cardiovascular health. Cardiovascular health research is supported through a wide variety of funding instruments ranging from Summer Student projects, Investigator Led Projects through to a Stroke Clinical Trials Network awarded in 2014 to support the conduct of multi-centre clinical trials.

Examples of cardiovascular research include:

- In 2012 we supported Professor Rose Ann Kenny with an ICE Award entitled “Effecting change in cardiovascular health of older Irish adults: rapid translation of cardiovascular health research findings into policy and practice in a recession”;

- In 2011 we supported Dr Andrew Smyth with a NSAFP award entitled “Sodium and Potassium Intake and Risk of Cardiovascular and Chronic Kidney Disease”.

This is complemented by other types of assessment such as health technology assessment (HTA). In 2014 the Government granted approval for the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a HTA of a public access defibrillation programme (PAD) for Ireland because there were a number of questions that needed consideration before designing a public access defibrillation programme. Following a Public Consultation in October 2014, the HIQA Board approved a Report and set of recommendations for the Minister. The Health Technology Assessment (HTA) examined the implication of establishing a national public access defibrillation (PAD) programme in Ireland to increase survival from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA). It estimated the clinical and cost effectiveness of a range of PAD configurations.

Hospital Appointments Administration

1537. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an MRI scan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28795/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

1538. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the availability of a drug (details supplied). [28800/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

National Positive Ageing Strategy

1539. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a forum for all stakeholders to address and plan for an ageing population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28804/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS), published on 24 April 2013, provides a framework for co-operation to address age-related policy and service delivery across Government and society in the years ahead. The Strategy is intended to promote older people's health and well being so that older people can continue to contribute to social, economic, cultural and family life in their own communities for as long as possible, thereby representing a vision for an age-friendly society. The Strategy highlights that ageing is not just a health issue, but rather requires a whole of Government approach to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and wellbeing of our ageing citizens.

At the launch of the Strategy, a commitment was made to publish an Implementation Plan to facilitate the translation of the Goals and Objectives of the Strategy into action on the ground. The approach to implementation originally included in the Strategy would have worked where a finite number of discrete and concrete steps could be taken after which the implementation could be deemed complete. However, many of the objectives included in this Strategy are quite broad, and can be viewed as a set of principles to which Government has committed, and which will inform policies that affect older people on an indefinite basis into the future, rather than concrete objectives that can be delivered in the short term.

The Department has therefore formulated new arrangements to implement and monitor the implementation of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. The revised arrangements were approved by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 27 October, 2016.

The new arrangements establish mechanisms that will give stakeholder groups effective and on-going access to Government Departments and State Agencies relevant to older people. This includes an annual Forum for stakeholders to identify what they consider to be their key priorities for Government for the coming year and the next three years; and establishing clear channels of communications between stakeholders and relevant Government Departments. In this regard, stakeholder representatives will engage with a named senior official on issues relevant to their remit, in order that the priorities identified by the stakeholders at the Forum can be pursued.

The inaugural stakeholder Forum took place on 30th March 2017, and was attended by civic society organisations who are representative of the needs and views of older people in Ireland. Following on from this successful Forum, the Department of Health has opened a dialogue with each of the Government Departments identified as having responsibility for the priorities agreed by stakeholders, in order that they are aware of the issues for discussion prior to being contacted by a stakeholder representative group. The Department of Health recently met with this stakeholder representative group, and will meet with them again in late 2017 to establish progress made and assist with any issues arising.

As part of the NPAS implementation process, a Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative has been established in collaboration with the HSE's Health and Wellbeing Programme and the Atlantic Philanthropies to measure the impact of the Strategy and establish an ongoing system for measuring and reporting on Positive Ageing. The Initiative will monitor changes in older people's health and wellbeing linked to the Goals and Objectives of the National Positive Ageing

Strategy. This will be done primarily through the development of Positive Ageing indicators to be published every two years. The Initiative is intended to provide evidence of the factors contributing to positive ageing, including at local level and ultimately inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland. The first national Positive Ageing Indicators report was published in 2016 and highlights many of the positive and negative aspects of growing old in Ireland.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy and the activities of the HaPAI are strongly embedded within the vision and actions set out for Healthy Ireland, the Government-led initiative which aims to create an Irish society where people of all ages can enjoy good physical and mental health, and where wellbeing is supported at every level of society. The Healthy Ireland Framework was launched in 2013 and seeks to provide people and communities with accurate information on how to improve their health and wellbeing and to make the healthy choices easier choices. Healthy Ireland takes a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach to improving health and wellbeing and the quality of people's lives and a number of new structures have been put in place to ensure that all sectors of society are given opportunities to participate.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

1540. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the immediate steps being taken to fill the 95 vacant nursing posts for Beaumont hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28807/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1541. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the likely timeframe for a decision to be reached regarding the addition of the freestyle libre flash glucose monitoring system for persons with diabetes to the long term illness reimbursement list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28849/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Data

1542. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 481 of 30 May 2017, if he will provide a breakdown of the 524 figure by number of months on the waiting lists showing 12, 24 and 36 months respectively by age and showing those under five years of age, 12 years of age and over 12 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28850/17]

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

Health Services

1543. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will address an urgent matter raised in correspondence relating to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [28866/17]

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.

Diabetes Strategy

1544. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fill the posts for which funding is available and for further posts in 2017 to fully implement the paediatric diabetes model of care published in December 2015. [28880/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

1545. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a paediatric endocrinologist post has been approved for the centre of excellence for Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28888/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Sligo University Hospital provides an essential high-quality hospital care to patients in the Northwest. I can assure the Deputy of the continued commitment to develop services in Sligo, including those for patients with diabetes.

With regard to paediatric diabetes services, an insulin pump therapy service commenced at Sligo University Hospital in early 2015, with outreach clinics delivered at Letterkenny. However, in mid-April the consultant paediatrician with a special interest in paediatric diabetes post in Sligo became vacant and the Saolta Healthcare Group has advised that it is actively engaged in recruiting a replacement.

Pending completion of the recruitment process, consultant paediatricians at Sligo and Letterkenny Hospitals have undertaken additional training and development to maintain provision of the paediatric insulin pump therapy services at both Hospitals. Further, additional support to these services has now been arranged with another Consultant, currently at another site within the Saolta Group.

Filling the permanent diabetes consultant post in Sligo will enable the Group to further advance its plan for this Diabetes Care Centre; provision of which is included in the 2017 Capital Plan. HSE Estates advise that planning permission for this Centre has been granted; construction is scheduled to commence by year end 2017 and to be completed by Q3 2018.

I will meet with both the HSE and the Saolta Healthcare Group during June, to discuss the current challenges and future development of diabetes services in the Northwest.

Hospital Records

1546. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding the hospital patient records of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [28889/17]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

1547. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the approval of the drug ippy/nivo by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28890/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

1548. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health when interim arrangements will be put in place with an endocrinology backed service to ensure the continued safety and best medical care for children and young persons in the north west; the position regarding the recruitment of an appropriate replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28893/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Letterkenny and Sligo University Hospitals provide essential high-quality hospital care to patients in the Northwest. I can assure the Deputy of the continued commitment to develop services in both Hospitals, including those for patients with diabetes.

Adult diabetes services at Letterkenny are currently provided by a consultant endocrinologist, supported by a locum consultant general physician with a diabetic interest. In order to address waiting lists, additional clinics are provided on a monthly basis. Further, the Saolta Healthcare Group has advised that it is making applications for approval of a second consultant endocrinologist and an advanced nurse practitioner post in insulin pump therapy, to serve both adult and paediatric patients.

With regard to paediatric diabetes services, an insulin pump therapy service commenced at Sligo University Hospital in early 2015, with outreach clinics delivered at Letterkenny. However, in mid-April the consultant paediatrician with a special interest in paediatric diabetes post in Sligo became vacant and the Saolta Healthcare Group has advised that it is actively engaged in recruiting a replacement.

Pending completion of the recruitment process, consultant paediatricians at Sligo and Letterkenny Hospitals have undertaken additional training and development to maintain provision of the paediatric insulin pump therapy services at both Hospitals. Further, additional support to these services has now been arranged with another Consultant, at another site within the Saolta Hospital Group.

Provision of a Diabetes Centre at Sligo Hospital is included in the 2017 Capital Plan. HSE Estates advises that planning permission for this Centre has been granted; construction is scheduled to commence by year end 2017 and to be completed by Q3 2018. Filling the permanent diabetes consultant post at Sligo will enable the Group to further advance its plan for this Dia-

betes Care Centre.

I will meet with the Donegal Branch of Diabetes Ireland, the HSE and the Saolta Health-care Group during June, to discuss the current challenges and future development of diabetes services in the Northwest.

Hospital Services

1549. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if, in the event of a paediatric endocrinologist not being found to replace a person (details supplied), the Dublin hospitals will take back persons repatriated to County Sligo due to Sligo not having an adequate service comparable to Crumlin or Temple Street, the original centres of excellence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28894/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1550. **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. [28904/17]

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

1551. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person concerned can expect an appointment. [28905/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

HSE Staff

1552. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if the position of community medical officer in County Mayo is vacant; if so, the length of time the position has been vacant; when the position will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28908/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

HSE Staff

1553. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if the position of community medical officer in County Mayo is vacant in view of the fact the community medical officer is the official with responsibility of issuing primary medical certificates and has the responsibility of issuing the primary medical certificates in the county with the absence of the community medical officer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28909/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question regarding the issuing of Primary Medical Certificates in County Mayo is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

1554. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the community ophthalmic services scheme (details supplied); his views on whether the process could be accelerated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28912/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 1555 answered with Question No. 1016.

Hospital Appointments Status

1556. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28918/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Supply

1557. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide funding for the Respreeza drug for persons suffering with emphysema or alpha 1 antitrypsin deficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28919/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Provision

1558. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if additional home help hours can be provided for a person (details supplied) who is visually impaired; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28920/17]

1559. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the Health Service Executive to allocate additional home help hours to a person (details supplied) who is in receipt of one hour per week. [28921/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1558 and 1559 together.

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

Question No. 1560 answered with Question No. 1016.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

1561. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in Cork city and county on a waiting list for orthodontic assessment and orthodontic treatment respectively; the number of consultants providing such services in Cork city and county; the vacancies for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28936/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1562. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied). [28943/17]

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 Promotion

1563. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the butterfly scheme dementia awareness programme to all hospitals nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28944/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

1564. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to address issues facing persons with dementia in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28945/17]

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.

National Drugs Strategy

1565. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the legal position of drug-testing kits that would allow MDMA ecstasy users to test drugs for their safety; if a person may be arrested for possession of these kits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28953/17]

1566. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if there have been developments regarding the proposal to allow users of drugs in venues such as clubs to have them tested for potentially lethal ingredients. [28954/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1565 and 1566 together.

Possession of a drug testing kit is not prohibited under the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 to 2017, so long as none of the constituent chemical components or reagents are subject to control under that legislation. However, it is important to note that the possession of a controlled drug, other than for legitimate medical or scientific purposes, is prohibited.

As the Deputy will be aware, a Steering Committee has been established to advise me on a new national drugs strategy from 2017 onwards. The development of the new strategy has involved a systematic review of international evidence on interventions to tackle the drug problem, including the use of harm reduction options such as drug testing kits. I expect to receive the Steering Committee's final report shortly. I hope to be in a position to bring my proposals to Government on the new Strategy thereafter.

Hospital Appointments Status

1567. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied). [28955/17]

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

1568. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [28959/17]

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.

Question No. 1569 answered with Question No. 1059.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1570. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical appointment for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this person was first referred for this appointment two years ago [28966/17]

20 June 2017

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.

In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 1571 answered with Question No. 1002.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

1572. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when one or more Parkinson's disease nurse specialists will be appointed at Cork University Hospital for the more than 1,000 persons living with Parkinson's in the Cork area, in view of the fact that a presence would reduce emergency admissions and would have a net cost saving to his Department. [28977/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

HSE Funding

1573. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of restoring funding to HSE section 39 organisations to enable them to meet pay restoration in line with HSE and section 38 organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28988/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Crisis Pregnancy Services

1574. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that have made contact with abortion pill providers in each of the past five years; the number of women that have used abortion pills here in each of the past five years (details supplied) [28992/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy's question refers specifically to the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

1575. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the treatment abroad scheme has been used to access medicinal cannabis; if medicinal cannabis has been applied for under the treatment abroad scheme already; and if any application under the scheme has been successful for medicinal cannabis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29010/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to you.

Hospitals Policy

1576. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the practice of hospital administration pressurising private insured patients into foregoing treatment as public patients as recently reported by the media (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29018/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Although a proportion of activity in public hospitals involves the provision of care to private patients, the core purpose of the system is to provide services for public patients. Government policy is to ensure there is equitable access for public patients, that the proportion of private activity is appropriately controlled and that the costs of provision of services to private patients are recouped by public hospitals.

The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all persons ordinarily resident in the country are, subject to certain charges, eligible for public in-patient hospital services. However, persons can opt to be treated privately on admission to a public hospital, in which case they are liable for the consultants fees and hospital charges arising for that episode of care, whether paid for by the patient or by a health insurer on their behalf. Where private in-patient services are provided the daily charges that apply depend on the category of hospital and whether the overnight accommodation was in a single or multi-occupancy room.

Hospital admission staff are required to speak with patients to establish whether they wish to be treated as a private patient and to sign the required forms. I would expect that no undue pressure would be placed on patients to be treated privately and I have previously stated that the operational procedures by the HSE to manage this process should take account of the health status of patients in hospitals. The HSE has indicated that it is always intended that admissions staff will only engage in a conversation with patients regarding their public or private status when appropriate and would consult with clinical staff involved in the treatment of a patient before engaging on this issue. I have asked my Department to ensure that common protocols are used to establish the wishes of patients in this regard.

It is worth noting that the Department has recently conducted an analysis of trends in private activity in public hospitals since the Health (Amendment) Act 2013 commenced. The key conclusion from the analysis is that the proportion of patients treated privately in public hospitals remained very stable over recent years and did not increase significantly following the introduction of the new charging regime in 2014.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

1577. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if there is a funding stream that is available to an organisation (details supplied); and his plans to support services such as this. [29022/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Local or Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces are responsible for allocating money for suitable projects, based on locally identified needs and priorities. Applications for funding for organisations should be made directly to the appropriate Drug and Alcohol Task Force. Contact details for Drug and Alcohol Task Forces are available at

<http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/national-drugs-strategy/local-and-regional-drugs-task-forces/>.

Primary Care Reimbursement Service Payments

1578. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost of restoring distance coding and of increasing the allowance to amounts (details supplied) under the rural practice allowance, in tabular form. [29028/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Since 2009, a number of reductions have been applied under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (FEMPI) to the fees and allowances paid to healthcare professionals, including GPs who provide services under the GMS scheme. The “distance code” was removed as a factor in calculating GP fees and allowances in 2010 under FEMPI. Certain fees payable to GPs such as capitation and out of hours fees varied according to a patient’s age, gender and distance of their residence from the GP’s surgery.

To accurately cost a reinstatement of the previous “distance code” arrangement would require a detailed exercise by the HSE, which would involve establishing a database for the current population of GMS patients containing their age, gender and distance of their residence from their GP’s surgery. The Primary Care Reimbursement Service, which is responsible for the remuneration of GPs for the range of services they provide under the GMS scheme, does not currently maintain such a database. Therefore, it is not possible to provide a cost estimate in respect of this element of the Deputy’s question.

Regulations were signed on 5th May 2016 which provide for the introduction of the new Rural Practice Support Framework (RPSF), which includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216.07 to €20,000 per annum.

Under this Framework, if two practice units are providing general practitioner services in the same qualifying area, both practices may qualify for a modified allowance of €10,000. GPs holding a permanent GMS contract who received the Rural Practice Allowance of €16,216.07 immediately prior to the introduction of the new Regulations who do not meet the new qualifying criteria continue to receive the payment on a personal basis, provided they retain their contractual commitment to the remote rural area.

As at 19th June 2017, there are 251 practice units in receipt of rural supports under the RPSF. 176 practices receive the full financial allowance of €20,000 and 19 practices receive the modified allowance of €10,000. Estimates of the approximate full year costs of increasing the existing allowance to the amounts specified by the Deputy, and the corresponding modified allowance to half of these amounts, are set out in the table below. Any increase in the financial allowance under the new RPSF would only apply to those practices that qualify under the new criteria, therefore these costings have excluded the 56 GPs who currently receive the old financial allowance of €16,216.07.

Estimated costs of increasing the current full allowance available under the Rural Practice Support Framework to the amounts specified by the Deputy, and the current modified allowance to half of these amounts

-	€
Increasing allowance to 21,000	€ 185,500
Increasing allowance to 21,500	€ 278,250
Increasing allowance to 22,000	€ 371,000
Increasing allowance to 22,500	€ 463,750
Increasing allowance to 23,000	€ 556,500

-	€
Increasing allowance to 23,500	€ 649,250
Increasing allowance to 24,500	€ 834,750
Increasing allowance to 25,000	€ 927,500
Increasing allowance to 25,500	€ 1,020,250
Increasing allowance to 26,000	€ 1,113,000
Increasing allowance to 26,500	€ 1,205,750
Increasing allowance to 27,000	€ 1,298,500

Departmental Staff Relocation

1579. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29040/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Civil Servants who are interested in transfers to regional offices can seek such transfers through the Departmental Transfer Lists or the Central Applications Facility which was maintained in the context of the decentralisation programme. In addition Civil Servants can also seek transfers through their Staff Association for head to head swaps. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy as applications from staff members of this Department to transfer to offices outside the Dublin region are currently not collated in the format requested by the Deputy. Staff from this Department who transfer to regional offices are not entitled to removal expenses as all such transfers are on a voluntary basis.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1580. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will have a medical procedure carried out at Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29063/17]

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

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

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

Maternity Leave

1581. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding maternity leave cover; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29064/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

1582. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29099/17]

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

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

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

Health Services Provision

1583. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding securing a bed for a person (details supplied) who requires intensive rehabilitation and physiotherapy. [29101/17]

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.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

1584. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for funding for flood relief (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28625/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Minister of State for the Office of Public Works and Flood Relief, recently announced the introduction of a once-off targeted Voluntary Homeowner Relocation Scheme. As part of the announcement the Minister outlined that further examination is ongoing by the OPW, Local Authorities

and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in evaluating, on an individual basis, if any alternative remedial works can be undertaken to protect those at risk farm buildings that flooded in order to inform the feasibility of any future once-off targeted scheme for Voluntary Farm Building Relocation.

This is being progressed at present to determine the feasibility of any future scheme and prepare the potential criteria. At this point it is not possible to identify the individual circumstances that will be covered by any potential flood damage support measure.

Dairy Sector

1585. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views regarding the growing infant formula industry here and the effects of the promotion of a largely unnecessary product on breastfeeding rates and children's health around the world, in view of the fact that the global percentage of mothers that are unable to produce enough milk is between 1 to 5%; his further views on the fact that the production of formula contributes to high agricultural emissions rates here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27951/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As a leading producer of high quality, safely and sustainably produced dairy products, Ireland is one of the leading producers of Infant Formula in the world. In 2016, Ireland exported over €1.2bn in finished Infant Formula products, as well as base powders for final product to be produced in other countries. The Infant Formula industry utilises milk from Irish farms and represents a significant value-added, and as such less susceptible to price volatility, segment of the dairy sector which has multiple positive effects for rural Ireland in terms of an outlet for quality farm produce as well as a source of high quality employment. In terms of environmental impacts mentioned by the deputy, Ireland is rated as having the most carbon efficient dairy production in the European Union, primarily attributable to our predominantly grass-based systems of production.

With respect to the specific issues raised by the deputy with respect to breastfeeding, officials in my Department have been advised by the Department of Health that the Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016 – 2021 sets out the priority areas to be addressed over the next 5 years to improve breastfeeding supports, to enable more mothers in Ireland to breastfeed and to improve health outcomes for mothers and children in Ireland. The implementation of the Action Plan by the Health Service Executive will enable the Executive to promote, support and protect breastfeeding in Ireland.

In the context of facilitating choice for those who cannot or decide not to breastfeed, infant formula offers an alternative.

Brexit Issues

1586. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has satisfied himself that previously entered into arrangements affecting the development of the blood stock industry between Ireland, the UK and France will continue to operate in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28429/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As has been the case across the entire agri-food sector, my Department has been in regular contact with Irish equine industry stakeholders in order to fully understand the potential implications of Brexit for that industry.

The sector is represented on the Department's Stakeholder Consultative Committee, which met most recently on 11 April, and it was also the focus of the most recent of the five sectoral dialogues that I have hosted under the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, which took place in Portlaoise last week. This latter event provided myself and my Department with a particularly valuable further opportunity to tease out the issues facing the sector in some detail, and to consider possible responses. It was made all the more worthwhile by the strong attendance of representatives from Northern Ireland, given the highly integrated nature of the industry on the island.

These contacts have given the industry the opportunity to flag its concerns in relation to Brexit, including in relation to the operation of the Tripartite Agreement, which facilitates the free movement of horses between Ireland, the UK and France. Indeed, this was an issue which featured very prominently at last week's Dialogue, and will be given careful consideration by myself and my Department over the coming period.

I would also point out that, in April this year, Department officials hosted the annual meeting of the Tripartite member countries and industry stakeholders, which provided the opportunity to discuss this issue with the UK and France. The matter has also been raised in the context of my Department's ongoing contacts with its counterpart in Northern Ireland, with the clear objective of retaining the arrangement in any post Brexit trade configuration.

Farm Enterprises

1587. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the increase in the cost of farm inputs with particular reference to fertilizers remains a concern; if he has satisfied himself that such increases remain manageable and will not affect the viability of farming enterprises in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28434/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Most recent CSO data on fertiliser prices (December 2016, January, February and March 2017) show increases in the price of Urea and CAN. These price increases are strongly linked to the price of natural gas which increased over the Spring period. Urea has increased from €321/tonne to €359/tonne, in part due to increased input costs for fertiliser manufacturers and a reduction in supply of Urea. Prior to this in 2016 we had seen a **decrease** in Urea price of 18% from €396/tonne in January 2016 to €321/tonne in December 2016 and overall fertiliser prices reduce by over 20% in 2016 based on CSO data.

Based on data compiled by the CSO fertiliser costs **reduced** from €565.4 million in 2015 to €503.2 million in 2016. This includes an increase in sales of 1.1% for 2016.

I understand that the issue of price of fertilisers is an important issue for farmers and is one of the main input costs on farms. Over the past 20 years fertiliser use has decreased by 28% reflecting improved environmental controls brought about by schemes like REPS, AEOS and GLAS. The Nitrates Directive limits the amount of Chemical Nitrogen and Phosphorus based on stocking limits and crop types. There is a greater awareness of the value of slurry which is being used to replace nutrients as chemical fertiliser prices increased. Irish farmers have a preference for using ammoniacal nitrogen in the form of Calcium Ammonium Nitrate (CAN) with over 80% of nitrogen purchased in this form. Farmers would benefit by switching to the cheaper ureic form (Urea) of nitrogen which has a price advantage of up to 30% over CAN without loss of production.

Teagasc has identified that soil pH has a large influence on nutrient availability with 64% of grassland soils below optimum pH. Grassland soils can release up to 80 kg N/ha per year when soils are at optimum pH. This can be achieved by the application of ground limestone based on soil analysis results.

A proposed fertiliser regulation is being discussed at EU Council and Parliament which will widen the range of fertilisers that will be available on the EU market and encourage the use of recycled material as fertiliser.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1588. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the statutory basis of the agricultural appeals office; the number of full time and part staff employed in the agricultural appeals office in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by staff category (details supplied) in tabular form; and the exchequer funding allocated to the appeals office in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28506/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Act 2001, along with the Agriculture Appeals Regulations 2002, provides the legal basis for the service.

Since 2002 the Agriculture Appeals Office (AAO) provides an independent appeal service to farmers who are dissatisfied with decisions of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine concerning designated schemes implemented by the Department.

Year	Director	Deputy Director	Appeals Officer	Higher Executive Officer	Executive Officer	Clerical Officer
2010	1 (Acting)		9* (F) + 1 (P)	1* (P)	1 (F)	3 (F) + 1 (P)
2011	1 (Acting)		7 (F) + 1 (P)	1 (P)	1* (F)	3 (F) + 1 (P)
2012	1* (Acting)	1 (Acting)	7* (F) + 1 (P)	1* (P)	1 (F)	3 (F) + 1 (P)
2013	1*		7 (F) + 1 (P)	1 (P)	1 (F)	3*(F) + 1 (P)
2014	1		10* (F) + 1 (P)	1* (P)	1 (F)	3*(F) + 1* (P)
2015	1		10 (F) + 1* (P)	1 (P)	1 (F)	2 (F) + 1 (P)
2016	1*		10* (F) + 1 (P)	1 (P)	1 (F)	2 (F) + 1 (P)
2017	1		10 (F) + 1* (P)	1 (P)	1 (F)	2 (F) + 1 (P)

Fulltime (F)/Part time (P)/*denotes staff changes during year

There are no other personnel in the Agriculture Appeals Office other than those provided in the table above.

An Annual Budget is provided to the Agriculture Appeals Office for expenses that may be incurred in relation to legal costs. All other costs in relation to administration, services and accommodation are paid for from the central voted funds of my Department.

The annual budget expenditure for the Office for the years 2010-2016 was as follows:

Year	Annual Expenditure €
2010	115,178
2011	13,349
2012	12,600
2013	88,067
2014	112,045
2015	18,418
2016	5,107

The annual budget allocation for 2017 is €91,000 of which €525.00 has been spent to date.

Greyhound Industry

1589. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the history of valuations for the Harold's Cross greyhound stadium commissioned by his Department or the Irish Greyhound Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28540/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Chairman of Bord na gCon wrote to my Department on 10 May seeking my approval and that of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the sale of Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium to the Department of Education and Skills.

The sale of Harold's Cross Greyhound Racing Stadium is a transaction between the Department of Education and Skills and Bord na gCon. I had no role in the approval of the sum of €23 million offered for the stadium. Indeed I understand that that sum was based on an independent valuation by the Valuation office and that this was provided and accepted by the transacting parties, in accordance with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform procedures governing the sale of state assets.

I was however required to consent to the sale of the asset by Bord na gCon in accordance with the code of governance for State Bodies. The necessary Ministerial consents for the sale have been provided, subject to the proceeds being used to substantially reduce the debt and to the submission of a comprehensive business plan by Bord na gCon.

This sale was consistent with a recommendation in the Indecon Report, commissioned by my predecessor, that Bord na gCon consider disposing of assets, including Harold's Cross Greyhound Racing Stadium, in order to reduce its debt levels. This debt stood at €21.4 million at 31st December 2016, and the cost of servicing it was a significant impediment to the Bord's ability to carry out its statutory obligation to the develop the industry.

I am confident that this sale, along with the new framework for improved governance and regulation currently undergoing pre legislative scrutiny in the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine, can provide a platform for a new beginning for the sector and a more sustainable future.

Departmental Functions

1590. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

amount of funding given by his Department to the Irish horse welfare trust in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form; the measures under which funding is provided; if his Department is satisfied that all governance matters in relation to the trust are adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28620/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides funding to animal welfare organisations directly involved in animal care and welfare services. This funding is intended only as a contribution to the overall costs of an organisation. Payments are made at year end and the following payments have been made to the Irish Horse Welfare Trust (IHWT).

Year Amount

2011 €30,000

2012 €35,000

2013 €49,000

2014 €60,000

2015 €87,000

2016 €50,000

No further direct payments have been made to date in 2017. The 2017 Exgratia Scheme will be advertised shortly and it is open to the IHWT to make an application for funding. A payment of €1,348 was made to the IHWT in 2015 to assist with the microchipping and passporting of Co Wicklow traveller owned horses. Strict governance rules apply to the provision of Department funding.

In the case of the equine passporting clinics, these were carried out by a PVP. With regard to ex-gratia funding, all recipients of funding are issued with Terms and Conditions to be adhered to by welfare organisations in receipt of funds. These include the necessity for compliance with good governance and with all animal health and welfare legislation etc. From 1 January 2017 only organisations registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority will be eligible to apply for ex-gratia funding from this Department.

GLAS Payments

1591. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28694/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year. The 85% payment for 2016 has been processed and payment has issued to the person named.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases with regard to Hen Harrier action. My Department has examined this issue with a view to reinstating the missing action and will be in contact with the applicant directly to finalise this issue.

Departmental Staff Data

1592. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department by county in tabular form. [29247/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The breakdown of staff per county is set out below in both number and Full-Time Equivalents (FTE). The situation within State agencies under my Department's auspices is a matter for the State Agencies themselves.

-	FTE	Number
Carlow	14	14
Cavan	211.8	229
Clare	15	15
Cork	282.3	300
Donegal	84	86
Dublin	523.2	549
Galway	61.8	63
Kerry	48.3	49
Kildare	470.5	495
Kilkenny	48.1	49
Laois	450.0	476
Leitrim	36.7	38
Limerick	73	74
Longford	13	13
Louth	5	5
Mayo	79.4	82
Meath	64.3	70
Monaghan	23	23
Offaly	34.4	35
Roscommon	43.4	44
Sligo	33.6	34
Tipperary	77.2	78
Waterford	44.1	45
Westmeath	29.9	31
Wexford	283.7	306
Wicklow	4.8	5
Seconded	12	12

Brexit Issues

1593. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if contingency planning is completed for the dairy sector with regard to processing in Northern Ireland if there is no agreement in Brexit talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26548/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The United

Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, Brexit, has fostered a great deal of speculation with respect to its future trading relationship with the union, including with Ireland. As 40% of Irish agrifood exports go to the UK, Brexit negotiations will be among the most important in terms of potential impact on the sector since the talks prior to Ireland joining the then-European Economic Community.

The United Kingdom including Northern Ireland represents Ireland's biggest dairy export market by a considerable distance, accounting for up to 30% of exports in the dairy sector. An important issue in terms of the Northern Ireland dimension to any prospective Brexit would be around the de facto all island milk market that currently exists.

Significant volumes of manufacturing milk or primary processed ingredients are taken in by a broad range of ROI processors from Northern Ireland processors. A number of processors also have significant cross border catchment areas in terms of their farmer suppliers, and any re-establishment of a hard border would pose direct difficulties in this respect. A number of dairy processors have stand alone companies in Northern Ireland approved to collect milk in compliance with EU regulations. This raw milk is routinely imported into ROI for processing. In the process to implement arrangements for Brexit, procedures including certification for importation of raw milk and product for further processing would need to be examined, assessed and agreed. In the absence of an agreement on a post Brexit trading or transitional arrangement, this trade would most likely be subject to tariffs, customs arrangements and official controls.

My Department is considering all of these possibilities in conjunction with relevant Government Departments, agencies and with industry. Ultimately, of course, Ireland's objective is to avoid such a scenario, and Government is working with other Member states and with EU institutions to ensure that there is an agreement on the terms of the UK's exit from the European Union and the future trading relationship which protects the interests of the agri food sector in Ireland, including the dairy sector.

Brexit Issues

1594. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has assessed the impact of Brexit on the fishing industry if British territorial waters are no longer part of the Common Fisheries Policy; if contingency planning has been completed regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26549/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At this stage it is impossible to say with certainty what effect Brexit will have on the Irish fishing industry. We don't yet know what changes the UK Government may seek to the current arrangements. I am, however, clear that our objective is to maintain our current access to fishing grounds in UK waters in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal and, to protect Ireland's current quota shares.

Earlier this year, I hosted a dedicated Civic Dialogue on the potential impacts of Brexit for the seafood sector as whole. This was very well attended by stakeholders from across the industry and gave a clear insight into the real dangers that a 'hard' Brexit presents for our fishing communities.

I will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them and my fellow fisheries Ministers in the EU to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

As part of this work, my Department is holding a further Brexit discussion with stakehold-

ers at the National Seafood Conference in Galway at the end of this month. This will include presentations from the Chairs of the North Western Waters Advisory Council and the North Sea Advisory Council respectively. These Councils represent industry and NGO stakeholders from all of the EU Member States with fishing interests in the UK zone. Representatives from the Irish fishing industry will also participate.

During the recent visit of Chief Brexit Negotiator, Mr. Michel Barnier to Ireland, I met with him and discussed the issues arising for the agri-food sector. On fisheries, I explained Ireland's perspective and that it was shared by a number of EU partners. I am satisfied that Mr. Barnier understands the issues and the potential significance of Brexit for Ireland's fisheries sector. Mr Barnier agreed with me that fisheries negotiations must be inextricably linked to the wider trade negotiations.

I also made clear that transitional arrangements are likely to be important for the seafood sector.

In conclusion, I will be working to ensure that fisheries remains high on the Brexit agenda in the EU and that we obtain the best possible outcome from the negotiations. I would like to assure the Deputy that I will be unequivocal in opposing any dilution of our existing EU quota shares and, any limitations on our existing rights of access.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1595. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive farm payments for 2016; the reason for the delay in issuing the payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26609/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2016 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 22 April 2016.

Under the ANC Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per hectare for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units per hectare calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year.

The Terms and Conditions of the ANC Scheme sets out that, under EU Regulation 21/2004, all flock owners' and sheep keepers are obliged to count the sheep in their flock, record this number in the flock register and thereafter are legally obliged to return this number to my Department via the annual Sheep/Goat Census return. The closing date for the receipt of census returns for acceptance under the scheme was 16 May 2016.

Processing of the 2016 ANC application of the person named identified that the holding concerned had not met these eligibility criteria as outlined in the Terms and Conditions.

A Department official has been in direct contact with the agent representing the person named regarding the late return of the sheep census. A letter has issued to the person named informing her of the findings, and of her right to seek a review of this decision within ninety days to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Food Exports

1596. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the opening up of the Taiwanese market for pork and beef; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26618/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is working on expanding market access for beef, sheepmeat, pigmeat, poultry and cooked meats across a range of markets and is also working to simplify certification procedures in a number of markets to which we already have access. The priorities of the industry are assessed through the form of quarterly meetings with relevant stakeholders.

In terms of beef market access, 2016 saw some considerable successes including the extension of our beef market access to the USA to include Beef Intended for Grinding (BIFG) as well as the opening of the Canadian & New Zealand beef markets and the re-opening of the Israeli beef market. Significant steps were also taken in terms of beef market access to China, South Korea and Vietnam in conjunction with the Trade Mission there. 2017 has already seen the re-opening of the Egyptian market to Irish beef and beef exports have now commenced. It has also seen the extension of our beef market access to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to include a range of minced and processed beef products, as part of my Trade Mission there.

Although Ireland remains committed to the One China policy, this does not prevent trade links with Taiwan. However, to date, we have not sought market access for either beef or pigmeat to Taiwan.

TAMS Payments

1597. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received a TAMS 2 payment; when payment will be received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26622/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a payment claim under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme. There were deficiencies in the documentation and the claim submitted and a query letter issued. While documents were received in response to this letter, the certificates submitted in response were not in order. These issues have now been resolved. As the claim included yard lighting which had not been completed when the claim was submitted, the claim will be subject to a penalty. The Department is currently finalising the IT system to allow the processing of penalties. Once completed the claim will be processed for payment.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1598. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied). [26644/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A report detailing findings of an inspection, on the holding of the person named, carried out by National Parks and Wildlife Service was referred to my Department's Cross Compliance Unit for attention. This report detailed breaches relating to the cross compliance requirements under the Habitats Directive, resulting in a 20% penalty being applied against the 2015 Direct Schemes payments. The person named was notified of this decision on 9 February 2016. A Department review of this decision was sought, the outcome of which was to up-hold the inspection findings. The person named appealed this decision to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office

and the outcome was partially successful. My Department has sought a review of the Appeals Officers decision (this decision) from the Director of the Agriculture Appeals Office and I understand that the review process is on-going.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1599. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal in relation to their AEOS and organic scheme payments; the reasons they have not been paid to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26702/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payment issued in respect of the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment for the person-named, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. Payments to cases that are finalised are issued on a weekly basis.

The person named was approved into the Organic Farming Scheme with a contract start of 1st January 2016. Payment will issue once pre payment validations are completed which are due to be finalised in the near future.

Commonage Framework Plans

1600. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the EU auditor is auditing the commonages here; and if so, the date on which this audit will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26705/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine is subject to ongoing audits from a number of bodies both at European and National level.

All land including commonage claimed by farmers under the Basic Payment Scheme comes within the scope of these audits. It would be inappropriate to comment further on the detail of specific audits.

Commonage Framework Plans

1601. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria that the EU auditor is examining commonages here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26706/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine is subject to audits from a number of bodies including DG Agri and the European Court of Auditors.

These audits can involve a review of the implementation by my Department of the various

EU regulations that relate to both the management and eligibility of land for payment, including commonages. The primary articles that cover land eligibility are detailed in EU Regulation 1307/2013 and the delegated EU Regulation 639/2014.

The interpretation of these Regulations is clearly set out in the booklet “A Guide to Land Eligibility” which my Department issued to all farmers in 2015. These land eligibility rules apply to all agricultural lands irrespective of whether the land is farmed in common or not.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

1602. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason inspectors training changed in 2017 from the years 2015 to 2016 whereby inspectors are now examining agricultural areas, especially wet or marshy agricultural areas with a view to these been omitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26707/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There has been no change in the treatment of wet marshy land since the publication of “A Guide to Land Eligibility” booklet in 2015. A copy of this booklet was sent to all farmers in 2015.

For land to be eligible for the area-based schemes it must be “agricultural area” or “agricultural land”. This is clearly stated in Basic Payment scheme terms and conditions and in the booklet. The booklet describes the type of land that is agricultural area/land and the type of land that is not agricultural area/land. The booklet also clearly sets out “areas requiring total exclusion” which includes “marshy or wet areas”. The booklet further demonstrates, by means of photographs, “ineligible- non agricultural marshy area” and “ineligible – non agricultural bog area”.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

1603. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason inspectors training changed in 2017 from 2015 to 2016 whereby inspectors are omitting hill tops within commonage areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26708/17]

1616. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the hill tops of commonage areas have been excluded under the proposed changes to the BPS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27177/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1603 and 1616 together.

The rules on the eligibility of “hill top” land have not changed since 2015. I can confirm that inspecting officers of my Department are not “omitting hill tops” within commonage areas.

My Department provides training, on an annual basis, for staff who carry out land eligibility inspections. The purpose of this training is to update inspecting officers on audit outcomes, clarifications on the governing EU regulations and guidance documents from various EU meetings and workshops and to ensure that the inspection process is up to the standard required of an accredited paying agency.

1604. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of live sheep imported into meat factories from Northern Ireland on a monthly basis in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26858/17]

1605. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of live sheep imported into meat plants from Great Britain on a monthly basis in the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26859/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1605 and 1604 together.

The movement of live animals from one Member State to another within the European Union is recorded on the European Commissions Trade Control and Experts System (TRACES). However there are no figures available from TRACES for the period prior to 2016.

However annual totals of sheep imported from Northern Ireland and slaughtered in the Republic of Ireland based on figures provided to my Department by slaughter plants for the period 2010 - 2016 are as follows;

2010: 390,534 (overall slaughter total: 2,119,843)

2011: 462,091 (overall slaughter total: 2,171,242)

2012: 406,619 (overall slaughter total: 2,431,283)

2013: 438,616 (overall slaughter total: 2,616,000)

2014: 378,699 (overall slaughter total: 2,599,039)

2015: 335,349 (overall slaughter total: 2,559,275)

Data from the TRACES system gives the following figures for 2016 and 2017;

2016: 374,902 (overall total: 2,633,969)

2017 (to June 9th): 154,423

In relation to imports of sheep for slaughter from Great Britain (England Wales and Scotland), there were 689 sheep imported for slaughter from Britain in 2016. There are no other available records showing imports of live sheep from Great Britain for the remainder of the period as requested by the Deputy.

Food Imports

1606. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of sheep carcasses imported into meat plants from Northern Ireland on a monthly basis in the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26860/17]

1607. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of sheep carcasses imported into meat plants from Great Britain on a monthly basis in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date 2017. [26861/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1607 and 1606 together.

Figures provided to my Department by the Central Statistics Office show that the following

quantities of sheep and lamb carcasses and half carcasses were imported to Ireland annually in the period 2010 – 2017:

	Great Britain	Northern Ireland
Year	Tonnes	Tonnes
2010	759	170
2011	790	308
2012	1,527	4
2013	1,731	
2014	3,032	
2015	3,347	
2016	2,238	
2017 (to March)	638	

It should be noted that the quantities imported are recorded in tonnes and not numbers of individual carcasses.

The available data does not give a breakdown regarding what proportion of these were for retail or further processing, nor is a monthly breakdown available.

Typically, imports into Ireland are made up of lower value manufacturing product or carcass sheep meat, which undergoes further processing by Irish companies before re-export. Whilst Ireland is of course a net exporter of sheep meat, imports of these products make an important contribution to the overall output of the sectors nationally and constitute a necessary component of the overall trade flows.

These figures represent a very small quantity of the overall sheep meat processed in Irish plants. For example in 2016 we exported 49,000 tonnes of sheep meat.

Departmental Expenditure

1608. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of spending by his Department on health and safety equipment and training for fishers over the past five years in tabular form. [26872/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the table below. Bord Iascaigh Mhara provides vocational safety training to the fishing fleet and grant aids safety related equipment through a number of de minimis schemes with Exchequer only funding. These are the Fleet Safety Scheme, the Marine Tourism Vessel Safety Scheme and the Enhanced Safety Training Scheme.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
BIM Safety Training					
Fleet Safety	€161,347	€142,331	€389,937	€379,801	€390,108
Marine Tourism Safety Scheme	€0	€11,038	€8,910	€21,084	€12,990
Enhanced Safety Training Scheme	€0	€0	€284,310	€192,270	€139,230
	€161,347	€153,369	€683,157	€593,155	€542,328

Brexit Negotiations

1609. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26896/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on **Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union**. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

My Department and its agencies have conducted a number of analyses on the potential impact a UK exit from the EU will have on Ireland's agri-food sector. These analyses range from initial and ongoing internal departmental assessments to published work by Teagasc and Bord Bia. This is an ongoing process, and will continue through extensive consultation with stakeholders via the Department's Stakeholder Consultative Committee and through the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, in respect of which I have already hosted five agri-food and fisheries sectoral dialogues.

While the main impact to date of the Brexit vote has been the effect of sterling volatility on those businesses that have a significant trading relationship with the UK, the medium to long term threats include the possible introduction of tariffs on trade between the EU and UK, potential divergences in regulations and standards between the EU and UK post-Brexit, and the implications of border controls and certification requirements. Failure to reach agreement on an exit or a transition period would most likely result in the application of WTO tariff schedules and this would have a very significant impact on the competitiveness of the Irish food offering in the UK. Difficult challenges also arise in relation to potentially restricted access to fishing grounds and resources; the freedom of the UK to negotiate trade agreements with third countries; border controls and certification which will most likely result in delays and additional costs; additional certification and sealing for products transiting through the UK en route to the EU.

I am very aware of these potential threats, but I remain very focused on supporting the agri-food industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop, and press Ireland's case at European level for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures, together with the minimisation of the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries. I will also seek to maintain Irish access to UK fishing grounds and protect Ireland's

quota share for joint fish stocks.

Brexit Issues

1610. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of Brexit related posts sanctioned, filled and unfilled for his Department and Bord Bia in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26913/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Co-ordination Unit within its EU and International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a newly-formed Brexit and International Trade Division. It comprises four staff working full-time on the co-ordination of Brexit issues, including a full-time Head of Division, who in turn reports to an Assistant Secretary General deeply engaged in Brexit issues in addition to discharging other responsibilities. The Unit co-ordinates the ongoing analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of 16 people drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). It also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The programme and activities of Bord Bia, the state agency responsible for the marketing and promotion of agri-food and drink, are all directly relevant to expanding market penetration and diversifying outlets for Irish food and drink against the background of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. Bord Bia currently has a staff of 116 and is in the process of recruiting for four more positions.

In overall terms, my Department is continuing to monitor the future workforce needs of both the Department and its agencies in relation to Brexit, and will be keeping resource allocations under close review as the negotiations proceed.

Public Sector Pensions Data

1611. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26965/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pension arrangements for State Bodies are, subject to an overall policy framework, an operational matter for those organisations. I have requested the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department to respond directly to the Deputy on the specific information requested.

Disability Act Employment Targets

1612. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in

each State and semi State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27130/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 provides for a statutory report on the employment of people with disabilities in the public sector. The Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform must submit a report to the National Disability Authority (NDA) giving details of the number of people with a disability employed in the Civil Service.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is complying with the Government target of 3% for the employment of people with a disability in that 4.3 % of its staff have declared a disability. My Department is committed to providing the supports necessary to enable staff with disabilities to participate fully in the workplace.

The Department has not advertised a competition specific to this quota. However my Department is committed to ensure that all internal competitions are in compliance with the Disability Act 2015.

Information in respect of the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the State Bodies themselves .

Agricultural Colleges Courses

1613. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of new training officers being employed to provide green cert courses in County Donegal; the number on the waiting lists for these courses in County Donegal; the timeframe for the placement of these new officers; the start date for the commencement of new courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27146/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The issues raised are operational matters for Teagasc.

I am advised that the Sligo/Leitrim/Donegal Advisory Region is provisionally looking at starting 4 new Part-time Green Cert classes in October 2017 (Ballymote, Manorhamilton, Letterkenny and Ballybofey). The number of classes and locations will not be finalised until later in the year. The expected intake will be approx. 130 students (65-70 in Donegal). Teagasc plan to appoint 2 new Temporary Education Officers in Donegal to facilitate the additional intake.

I am also advised that 274 people have registered an interest in completing the Green Cert with Teagasc in Donegal. It's not clear at this stage how many will translate into formal applications and have to be accommodated on the Green Cert in due course. The 4 new classes proposed for this autumn will bring the total number of Green Cert classes in the Sligo/ Leitrim/ Donegal region to 16 and the total number of students close to 500.

GLAS Payments

1614. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a 2015 GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27163/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a GLAS 1 application and following the initial checks the Bird Box action was rejected resulting in the application not being approved as the minimum score of 16.3 was not achieved on the remaining actions.

However the Department has reviewed this decision and has deemed the action eligible which means that the Bird Box action will be reinstated. The application will be reassessed with a view to approving the person named into the scheme.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

1615. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27168/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application for grant-aid under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme on 07 April 2017. This is Tranche 6 of the scheme. All applications received in a given tranche have to be checked to ensure that all administrative issues are in order. Once this process is complete a ranking and selection process is carried out and all eligible applications within the available tranche budget are sent to the local office for final technical appraisal before approvals issue. It should be noted that the submission of an application to the TAMS II scheme does not mean automatic approval. This process is currently underway for the applications received in Tranche 6.

Question No. 1616 answered with Question No. 1603.

Bord na gCon Administration

1617. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action taken regarding the Irish Greyhound Board issuing an interest free loan to the private operators of a racetrack (details supplied); the amount loaned; the amount paid back to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27178/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon (BnG) has statutory responsibility under the Greyhound Industry Acts 1958 and 1993 for the control, development and improvement of the greyhound racing industry.

The issue to which the Deputy refers is an operational matter for BnG. That organisation is specifically empowered under Section 16(1) of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, to provide loans for the ‘improvement of greyhound race tracks, authorised coursing grounds and the amenities thereof’ and for ‘any other purpose conducive to the improvement and development of the industry.

I am informed by BnG that financial support in the form of a trading facility was made available to Davis Road Greyhound Stadium plc (DRGS) to assist the management of DRGS in finalising the project towards the construction of a new grand stand along with improvement of racing facilities including adherence to Health and Safety standards. DRGS is a private trading company with transactions between this company and BnG being subject to matters of commercial sensitivity.

Clonmel has a long established tradition of hosting racing on a Sunday night which is a very

valuable asset to the Greyhound Industry in light of the plans for the further commercialisation of Irish Greyhound Racing. Additionally Clonmel has a reputation of breeding top quality greyhounds therefore it was deemed appropriate to support the wider industry in this area.

The facility referred to is part of the continuing trading relationship between BnG and DRGS with all commitments being honoured in full to date by DRGS.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1618. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application by a person (details supplied); the stage this application is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27188/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application for the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme was received on behalf of the person named in December 2016. Part of the proposed site is adjacent to Toome Lough, which had recently supported a pair of breeding Curlew, a red-listed species.

The applicant and his registered forester were requested to carry out a species appropriate survey during the breeding season to confirm the existence of breeding curlew. This report was received and will be reviewed by my Department's Ecologist before it is forwarded to the Forest Service Inspector for their final recommendations. Once the Inspector's recommendations are received, a final decision will issue to the applicant.

A separate application had been received on behalf of the person named in August 2016. The applicant and his forester were advised that one plot was not suitable for afforestation due to shallow soils. Part of this particular plot is determined to be non-utilisable agricultural land. A request was made for a drainage survey on other plots in this application and for a revised bio-diversity map to highlight and account for retained hedges/scrub and other unplanted areas. A response from the applicant and his forester is still outstanding and the application cannot be progressed until this is received.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

1619. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there are regulations for the CAP programme 2014-2020 which would preclude him from including farm forestry planted before 2009 as eligible land for the purposes of the basic payment and greening payment schemes. [27228/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Article 32 (2) (a) of EU Regulation 1307/2013 defines what is known as the "eligible hectare". With regard to Basic Payment Scheme and Greening payments an applicant must have an eligible hectare for each payment entitlement on which they wish to draw down payment. The eligible hectare is further defined as an agricultural area with an agricultural activity carried out upon it.

Under Article (4)1(e) of EU Regulation 1307/2013 an agricultural area is clearly defined as any area of permanent grassland, arable or permanent crops. As permanent crops do not include forestry the only means by which forestry can be made eligible and hence paid on is the exemption granted under Article 32 (2) (b) of EU Regulation 1307/2013. This allows for land which was eligible in 2008 but has since become ineligible, for example due to the planting of forestry, to be deemed eligible. Therefore forestry land planted in 2008 or before is not an eligible crop

for payment purposes under the Basic Payment Scheme.

Food Exports

1620. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made to date at EU level regarding the possible reopening of the Russian market for some food products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27235/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The ban by the Russian Federation on a range of EU agri-products, which was imposed in August 2014, has had direct and indirect impacts for the EU and Irish agri-food sectors.

Some Member States, such as Ireland, whilst having a less direct exposure to the Russian market than other Member States such as the Baltic Countries, are affected indirectly as additional product which would have been destined for the Russian market becomes available on EU and global markets. In this respect the Russian ban, when initially imposed, exacerbated what was an already softening global dairy outlook. Whilst there is evidence that new markets have been found for EU dairy produce in the intervening period, any reopening of the Russian Market would be a welcome development as I am aware that Irish companies, for example in the dairy, meat and seafood sectors, view it as a market of significant potential.

It must be taken into consideration that the issues giving rise to the Russian ban were geopolitical in nature and any amelioration of the situation will also no doubt have to be in that context. The Russian market remains open to a number of important products such as Infant Formula, and the Russian authorities have made a number of minor adjustments to the list of banned products in accordance with domestic needs. There has been no progress, however, in the EU/Russian negotiations to remove the ban. Ireland and the EU continue to engage with the Russian Federation on issues of access for Irish and EU food business operators and products.

Turbary Rights

1621. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter in respect of turbary rights (details supplied) will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27262/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials in my Department will be in contact with the solicitor representing the registered owner setting out the requirements under which the removal of turbary rights can be considered.

Agriculture Scheme Eligibility

1622. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to carry out new inspections in relation to the eligibility of hill land for the basic payment scheme; if there has been a change of criteria being used to establish eligibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27273/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The EU regulations governing the various area-based Direct Payment Schemes and Rural Development measures requires my Department to carry out on-the-spot inspections annually to ensure compliance with the eligibility requirements, including land eligibility, of the various schemes. In

the case of land eligibility inspections, the requirement is for 5% of beneficiaries to be inspected and such inspections involve examination of all land types declared by an applicant, including “hill land”. There has been no change to the inspection requirement as prescribed in the relevant EU legislation.

For land to be eligible for the various area-based schemes it must be “agricultural area” or “agricultural land”. This is clearly stated in the booklet “A Guide to Land Eligibility” which my Department issued to all farmers in 2015. The booklet describes the type of land that is agricultural area/land and the type of land that is not agricultural area/land.

There has been no change to the criteria being used to establish land eligibility since the publication of the “A Guide to Land Eligibility” booklet in 2015.

Land Issues

1623. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of inspections carried out by his Department on hill land eligibility since 1 January 2016; the number of persons that have had their eligible land reduced as a result of such inspections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27274/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department does not keep records of land eligibility inspections on the basis requested by the Deputy.

Land eligibility inspections undertaken under the various area-based schemes involve the examination of all land types, including lowland and hill land, that are declared by applicants who are selected for an inspection. Records are not maintained on the basis of specific land types.

Departmental Surveys

1624. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of recent studies, surveys and assessments conducted by his department at a location (details supplied) in County Donegal; the reason and purpose for such activities that have been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27290/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has not conducted any recent specific studies, surveys or assessments in relation to the area referred to by the Deputy. It would be normal for staff of my Department’s Marine Engineering Division and/or one of my Department’s marine agencies to visit such areas as part of normal duties.

Forestry Grants

1625. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a forest road grant will be paid to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27322/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forest Road Application from the person concerned has been approved and payment will issue to him this week.

GLAS Payments

1626. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the GLAS 2 Payments for a person (details supplied) can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27397/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of the 2016 GLAS prepayment checks on the application of the person named a cross check was carried out with the information submitted in his 2016 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application. This check indicated that in his 2016 BPS claim the GLAS Wild Bird Cover parcel, which is an arable crop, was declared by him as permanent pasture.

My Department has contacted the person named directly informing him of what he needs to do to allow processing of the GLAS 2016 payment to continue.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

1627. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the suckler cow scheme will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27406/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This application was made under the Beef Data and Genomics Programme 2015 - 2020. Ownership of the herd number in question changed since the initial application was received and this resulted in additional information being required. All of this information has now been received and payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year is scheduled to issue in the next two weeks, subject to confirmation of compliance with all other requirements of the programme.

Transfer of Entitlements

1628. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the sale or transfer of entitlements will be completed with regard to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27431/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has received two 2017 Transfer of Entitlements applications from the first named person seeking the transfer of entitlements by sale to two separate Transferees. The Transferee signatures on the applications have been witnessed by the second and third named persons respectively.

My Department has now commenced processing of 2017 transfer applications. Once the applications have been completed both Transferor and Transferees will be notified in writing.

Departmental Contracts

1629. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27445/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the following table.

I have requested the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department to respond directly to the Deputy, on the specific information requested, as this is an operational matter for the organisations themselves.

March-December 2011

Title of Contract awarded to Ac-centure	Basis for Contract	Cost € (VAT @ 23% included in Cost)
Procurement expenditure and supporting business processes	An analysis of an internal review of Procurement	Work done on a pro - bono basis
Shared services opportunities for payroll, ICT and accommodation between the Department and five of its agencies	An examination of the opportunities and capacity for further shared services between DAFM and its non-commercial state agencies	Work done on a pro - bono basis
Department's role in meat plants	A review of the Department's role in regulating meat plants	Work done on a pro - bono basis
Maintenance and Enhancement of the Single Payment scheme (SPS) Computer System April 2011 to March 2014	To work with the Department's IMT staff in maintaining and developing the SPS Computer System	3,453,775
Contract for Business Analyst	To work with the Fisheries Business stakeholders in the preparation of business requirements documents for Fisheries application development	102,694
Contract for Java Developer	To work with the Department's IMT staff in maintaining and developing the Fisheries systems	95,125
Contract for software development of the Generic Claims Processing System (GCPS)	To work with the Department's IMT staff in maintaining and developing the GCPS Computer System	134,501

2012

Title of Contract awarded to Ac-centure	Basis for Contract	Cost € (VAT @ 23% included in Cost)
Contract for software development of the Generic Claims Processing System (GCPS)	To work with the Department's IMT staff in maintaining and developing the GCPS Computer System	245,086
Contract for Java Grails Developer	To work with the Department's IMT staff in maintaining and developing the Fisheries systems	145,410

2013

Title of Contract awarded to Ac-centure	Basis for Contract	Cost £
Nil		

2014

Title of Contract awarded to Accenture	Basis for Contract	Cost € (VAT @ 23% included in Cost)
Software development and maintenance of the Animal Health Computer System (AHCS)	To work with the Department's IMT staff in maintaining and developing the Animal Health Computer System (AHCS)	3,433,223

2015

Title of Contract awarded to Accenture	Basis for Contract	Cost £
Nil		

2016

Title of Contract awarded to Accenture	Basis for Contract	Cost € (VAT @ 23% included in Cost)
A review of the Department's enterprise architecture	To work with the Departments IMT staff to identify the technologies and processes required to best support development of modern and secure systems and applications	213,405

2017

Title of Contract awarded to Accenture	Basis for Contract	Cost € (VAT @ 23% included in Cost)
Nil		

TAMS Payments

1630. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TAMS grant payment will issue to persons (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27530/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicants have approval in place for milk storage and cooling investments under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II. No claim for payment has been received from the applicants in respect of this investment as yet.

The applicants have made a further application for a number of additional investment items on 3 April 2017. This application has passed the administrative checks and will be progressing to the Ranking and Selection process in the near future. Following this process and if the application is successful it will be assessed in the local office for technical issues prior to approval

being granted.

Felling Licences Applications

1631. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a felling licence for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27542/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The application for a felling licence, which was received on 2nd February 2017, has been reviewed by my Department. National Parks and Wildlife Service and Inland Fisheries Ireland were also contacted for their observations, which will inform my Department's our recommendations on this application.

These recommendations are expected shortly and the applicant will receive a decision on her licence application by post in the coming days.

It should be noted that there is no fee payable to the Department for a Felling Licence application. If an individual retains a contractor to carry out the felling operation, this is a private arrangement to which my Department is not a party.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

1632. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of entitlements not transferred to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27583/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A 2014 Transfer of Entitlements application form was submitted to my Department seeking the transfer of entitlements by sale to the first named person from the second named person.

Additional information required to facilitate the processing of the transfer application was requested on three separate occasions from the legal representatives of the second named person. As this information was not received the transfer was deemed unsuccessful and both parties were notified of this decision in writing in June 2015 and offered the option to appeal the decision. No appeal was subsequently received by my Department.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1633. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the charges of €145 per year (details supplied) by Teagasc to farmers for participation in the knowledge transfer groups is within the terms and conditions of the scheme in view of the fact Teagasc is already receiving a €500 per year payment for each participant in their groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27667/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Knowledge Transfer Programme under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 is delivered by a network of approved Knowledge Transfer Facilitators. Facilitators who meet their commitment under the programme are due a payment per participant of €500 for each year of the three year programme while farmers are due €750. Payment to facilitators under the

programme covers the cost of preparing for and holding meetings as well as the time they spend producing an individualised Farm Improvement Plan for each farmer participant. My Department does not require a participant under the Knowledge Transfer Programme to be a client of Teagasc. It was open to participants to enrol in a group facilitated by either a private or Teagasc advisor.

In addition to its involvement in the Knowledge Transfer Programme, Teagasc also provide an extensive range of Advisory Services to Ireland's farmers, including 45,000 direct contracts. The primary purpose is to maximise the income and sustainability of farm families within rural communities through improved farm efficiency, based on the transfer of knowledge, new technologies and best practice to all sectors of the industry. The cost of delivering these services is partially borne by the State in the form of an annual Grant-in-Aid, with the balance provided by fees charged to farmers, and some programme support from industry – mainly dairy processing co-ops.

Information and Communications Technology

1634. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the significant problems that arose with his Department's information technology systems which caused delays in payments in rural development schemes such as GLAS; if he can now reassure persons that all these problems have been rectified in order that there will be no recurrence in respect of the applications for schemes in late 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27669/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the context of the Rural Development Programme 2015 - 2020 the Department has delivered over twenty new schemes that were supported by IT capability in last two years. In the first two years of the current RDP programme my Department has already implemented substantially more RDP schemes than were implemented over the entire ten year lifetime of the previous RDP programme. To date Ireland has drawn down funding at a rate that is 2.4 times higher than the EU average. This rate of delivery and draw-down would not have been possible without the availability of high quality complex IT software systems to support the business units in operating these schemes. Since 2014 my Department has adopted a policy of implementing fully digital end-to-end support for all but the smallest of schemes.

My Department has an excellent record in the delivery high quality ICT systems. In that respect my Department is ahead of the rest of our European partners and is also highly regarded across the Civil and Public Service. We have been consistently among the first to make payments in the EU.

A number of issues arose in relation to the GLAS system and, as I advised previously, I regret the difficulties that this may have caused to a number of farmers. All but a very small amount of outstanding work has been completed and plans are in place to address this over the coming period.

Food Imports

1635. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cattle and in particular the number of cows that have been imported from Scotland for direct slaughter in meat processing plants here from 1 January 2017 to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27670/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Figures extracted from my Department's Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) database give the following details for live imports of cattle from Scotland for slaughter thus far in 2017*;

Imports from Scotland	Male	Female (Total)	Females over 24 months
580	7	573	573

The Deputy should note that in this context, there is no further breakdown available in relation to whether those females over 24 months are heifers or cows. In this period, Irish meat factories have slaughtered approximately 700,000 head of cattle. The overwhelming majority of cattle slaughtered in the state were born and raised in Ireland the live imports constitute a very small percentage of the overall total national kill.

* as of June 9th.

Commonage Land Use

1636. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria being employed by his Department for land eligibility inspections on commonage and upland areas; the criteria the inspectors are employing in determining the eligibility of lands affected by the birds and habitats directive on designated Natura 2000 sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27671/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): For land, including commonage and upland areas, to be eligible for the various area-based schemes it must be "agricultural area" or "agricultural land". This is clearly stated in the booklet "A Guide to Land Eligibility" which my Department issued to all farmers in 2015. The booklet describes the type of land that is agricultural area/land and the type of land that is not agricultural area/land. There has been no change in the treatment of commonage and upland areas since the publication of this booklet in 2015. A copy of the booklet is available on the Department website -

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/farmingschemesandpayments/basicpaymentscheme/LandEligibility2015Booklet010515.pdf>.

The booklet also details the provision, set out in the EU regulations governing the area-based schemes, where areas have become ineligible and this is due to compliance with the requirements of the birds and habitats directives. This provision prescribes specific criteria whereby such land may be deemed eligible for payment and can only apply to agricultural land that has not been abandoned.

Departmental Expenditure

1637. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27702/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has made no payments to the company referred to.

I have requested the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department to respond directly to the Deputy, on the specific information requested, as this is an operational matter for the or-

ganisations themselves.

Food Industry Development

1638. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on opinions expressed with regard to the lack of a wholesale whiskey market (details supplied); his plans for policy measures to help develop a wholesale whiskey market; his further views in relation to structural problems in the whiskey market here which inhibit the ability of small whiskey brands to develop the potential of the whiskey industry to mirror the success of the Scottish whiskey industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27741/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish Whiskey is currently the fastest growing spirit drink in the world and the industry here has expanded to deliver exports worth €505 million in 2016. Export volumes are projected to increase from 7 million cases in 2014 to 12 million cases by 2020 and 24 million cases by 2030.

Significant investment supported by Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia has taken place in recent years in the expansion of existing facilities, development of new distilleries and marketing. As Irish Whiskey must, under EU and Irish law, be matured in wood for at least three years it will take some time for increased production to reach the market, but this should improve opportunities for the creation of a wholesale market. I would welcome any industry initiative to facilitate the development of a wholesale Irish Whiskey market but I do not have the power to compel individual distilling companies to set aside part of their production for such a market.

Felling Licences Applications

1639. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will issue in respect of a felling licence for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27775/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application for a felling licence, was received on 2nd February 2017 on behalf of the named person and has been reviewed by my Department. National Parks and Wildlife Service and Inland Fisheries Ireland were also contacted for their observations, which will inform the Inspector's recommendations on this application.

The Inspector's recommendations are expected shortly and the applicant will receive a decision on her licence application by post in the coming days.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1640. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an AEOS payment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27795/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1st September 2011. Payment issued in respect of the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment for the person-named, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. This process is on-going and payments are issued on a weekly basis as cases are finalised.

Appointments to State Boards

1641. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28208/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have not appointed any former TDs to the boards of the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department.

Live Exports

1642. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1172 of 2 May 2017, if he will provide the evidence to demonstrate the difference among EU member states, in view of his statement (details supplied); the information as to which member states he is referring to; and the way in which standards and legislative codes of practice here are higher. [28057/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As an island nation that relies on the transport of cattle by sea, my Department has put in place stringent rules governing the approval of dedicated livestock vessels. The Diseases of Animals (Carriage of Cattle by Sea) Orders, 1996 and 1998 set out the requirements for approval. The arrangements include the submission of voyage plans and journey reports, and the ability to revoke approval in cases of non-compliance.

European Union legislation in respect of animal welfare conditions during transport are laid down in EC No 1/2005 (Protection of Animals During Transport and Related Operations). This Regulation includes a provision expressly requested by officials of my Department, which states in Article 1(3) that “This regulation shall not be an obstacle to any stricter national measures aimed at improving the welfare of animals during transport taking place entirely within the territory of a Member State or during sea transport departing from the territory of a member state”, thereby safeguarding the stringent Irish measures that are in place.

My Department updated the existing Diseases of Animals (Carriage of Cattle by Sea) Orders, 1996 and 1998 requirements with current legislation enacted by SI 356 of 2016 (Carriage of Livestock by Sea Regulations 2016). These Regulations continue to play a critical role in safeguarding the welfare of animals transported by sea, and are unique by European Union standards.

Departmental Meetings

1643. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if employees of his Department, including Met Éireann employees, have attended the meetings

of a group (details supplied); and if so, if they have reported back to his Department on the proceedings of the meetings of the group. [28062/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I can confirm that no employee of my Department has attended the meetings referred to in this question. Regarding Met Éireann employees, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment is the parent Department and therefore best placed to provide this information.

Postal Codes

1644. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28132/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The total cost of designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system is €278,875 from 2011 to date. The main development costs were incurred during 2014 and 2015 (see Table 1 below).

Table 1 – Breakdown of expenditure on design, implementation and support of the Eircode system from 2011 to date

Year	Expenditure €
2011	500
2012	1,000
2013	1,000
2014	65,500
2015	205,875
2016	5,000
2017	Nil
TOTAL	€278,875

TAMS Applications

1645. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a TAMS application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28175/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question submitted a claim for payment under the LESS Scheme of TAMS II. The claim was approved for payment on 8 June 2017.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1646. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28202/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question has created a draft claim for expenditure under the Low Emission Slurry Spreading Scheme. However this claim has not yet been submitted. The applicant has been contacted by

phone to advise him of the position. When the applicant submits his claim for payment it will be processed and payment made in due course.

In addition, the applicant has received approval for a mobile handling unit. A further application has been received for a Mass Concrete tank and Animal Housing under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme (AWNSS). The application in this case has passed the administrative checks and it is anticipated that it will be sent to the local office in the near future for final technical checks before approval issues.

Brexit Negotiations

1647. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the Government's publication, Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, and in particular the implications for trade and customs on businesses, particularly in the agrifood sector here, in view of the fact that the UK is its largest export market; the actions that are being taken by him and his Department to consult with the business sector here; and the ramifications of changes on customs, in particular on the business sector. [22096/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On 2 May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

My Department and its agencies have conducted various analyses of the likely impact of Brexit on the agrifood sector. These analyses range from initial and ongoing internal departmental assessments, to published work by Teagasc and Bord Bia. This is an ongoing process, which will continue to take place as the negotiations unfold.

An important input to this analysis comes from businesses and stakeholders through the extensive consultation processes that I and my Department have put in place. Our Stakeholder Consultative Committee is comprised of representatives from across the sector and has met on a number of occasions since the UK referendum, most recently on 11 April. It is complemented by the agrifood and fisheries sectorial dialogues that I have hosted under the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, which have given businesses and representatives north and south of the border the opportunity to have their concerns discussed in some detail, including in relation to customs-related issues. Five of these dialogues have taken place for the agrifood and fisheries sectors, most recently with the drinks sector on 3 May and with the equine and greyhound sectors on 9 June.

While the main impact to date of the Brexit vote has been the effect of sterling volatility on those businesses that have a significant trading relationship with the UK, the medium to long term threats include the possible introduction of tariffs on trade between the EU and UK, potential divergences in regulations and standards between the EU and UK post-Brexit, and the implications of border controls and certification requirements. Difficult challenges also arise in relation to potentially restricted access to fishing grounds and resources.

In response to the challenges posed, I have undertaken a number of important steps within my own Department, which include the establishment of a Brexit Response Committee and a dedicated Brexit Co-ordination Division.

Last October, as part of Budget 2017, I announced measures aimed at alleviating the exchange rate volatility pressures, which include the introduction of the 'Agri Cashflow Support' loan fund of €150 million; enhanced taxation measures and an additional allocation of €2 million to Bord Bia (on top of previous additional funding in 2016 of €1.6 million) to ensure that it is in a position to provide Brexit-related supports to affected businesses, including through its new Brexit Barometer. I also provided for increased funding under the Rural Development Programme and Seafood Development Programme.

I am very aware of the potential threats created by Brexit for the agri food sector, and I remain fully focused on supporting the industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop, and to press Ireland's case for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures, together with a minimisation of the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries.

GLAS Administration

1648. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures his Department has in place to incentivise no till agriculture in the interest of protecting soils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27937/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Minimum Tillage and Catch Crop actions under the Green Low-carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) operated by my Department contribute to the objectives of reducing emissions and protecting soil structure. Almost 30,000 hectares of catch crops are being delivered and over 10,500 hectares of tillage crops are sown under the scheme without any primary cultivation by using minimum tillage sowing equipment.

Air Quality

1649. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address concerns regarding new proposals on spreading slurry. [28228/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware of recent media coverage and at the outset, it is important to note that the lead on this issue is the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment as it relates to the National Clean Air Strategy consultation which was open during March and April this year.

Within this context, the consultation document identified the main issues in relation to air quality and emission sources. It recognised that the spreading of slurry can, depending on the

timing of the application and the weather conditions, result in nitrogen loss from slurry to the atmosphere through ammonia volatilisation. That Department will conduct a thorough examination of all submissions received as part of its consultation phase. No decision has been taken by this on a total ban. My Department continues to liaise closely with colleagues in DCCAIE on this matter.

Interestingly on foot of farmer demand to improve the utilisation of slurry as a fertiliser, my Department is assisting farmers under TAMS in the purchase of Low Emission Slurry Spreading equipment where to date 539 applications have been received for trailing shoe, 394 applications for the dribble bar and 14 applications for shallow injection. Overall across all low emissions technologies over 1,058 applications have been received which is above expectations. There are no splash plate systems being grant-aided. In addition more than 4752 farmers have applied under the GLAS scheme to apply slurry using low emission equipment.

This is being driven by farmers themselves wanting to maximise the value of the slurry on their own farms, rather than as a regulatory requirement. Recently, the Association of Farm and Forestry Contractors of Ireland also identified their support for this technology.

However, it is fully understood that this technology is not suitable for all farms.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

1650. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay with an AEOS payment being issued to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28263/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named commenced their AEOS 2 contract on 1 September 2011. Payment issued in respect of the 2011-2015 Scheme years.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment for the person named, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be processed. This process is on-going and payments are issued on a regular basis as cases are finalised.

Coillte Teoranta Lands

1651. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the sale of a holiday complex (details supplied); the estimated completion time for works; the timeframe for it to open to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28346/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their forest estate and land transactions, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that a sales contract for the sale of Killykeen Holiday Complex in County Cavan has now been signed with CABŪ. Coillte also advise that, as stated in their press announcement of 10 May 2017, CABŪ hope to open this

holiday destination for visitors by April 2018 with a view to developing the site further over a period of three years.

Coillte Teoranta Lands

1652. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has met with or plans to meet with persons (details supplied) regarding the sale of a park. [28347/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their forest estate and land transactions, are the responsibility of the company.

I understand from Coillte, however, that a sales contract for the sale of Killykeen Holiday Complex in County Cavan, to which the Deputy is referring, has now been signed with CABŪ. I have not met, nor do I have any plans to meet, with CABŪ.

TAMS Applications

1653. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a TAMS application for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; when the payment will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28359/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned submitted an application for payment under TAMS. However, when his application was examined, it was found that there was an error in the information provided. My Department has reviewed this and rather than requiring a new application to be made, has decided that the error can be corrected internally and should not impact on the processing of the payment in question. Accordingly the application is currently being processed and payment will issue as soon as possible.

Grocery Industry

1654. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ban the below-cost selling of vegetables, fruit and potatoes. [28390/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The legislative powers to tackle the matters mentioned are under the auspices of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, together with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission. The Commission, which was established on 31 October 2014, is the statutory body responsible for enforcing consumer protection and competition law in Ireland.

During 2014, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation introduced the Competition and Consumer Protection Act (No 29 of 2014). The Act provides for the making of provisions for regulating certain practices in the grocery goods sector.

The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation implemented the Grocery Goods Regulations under this legislation in February 2016, applying to sales and supply contracts, renewed or entered into by producers and growers with their retailers and supermarket multiples, with

effect from 30 April 2016. These provisions will guide the supermarkets in how they deal with our producers in a fair and reasonable manner.

The price levels struck by growers with retail outlets are entirely a commercial matter. Whilst it is not my role to set supermarket prices for agricultural products or to be involved in price negotiations between growers and retailers, I very much encourage greater co-operation and discussion between all parties in order to ensure the viability of the largest number of Irish growers possible.

Food Industry Development

1655. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on establishing a wholesale bulk whiskey market similar to that established in the Scotch whisky industry. [28401/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Irish Whiskey is currently the fastest growing spirit drink in the world and the industry here has expanded to deliver exports worth €505 million in 2016. Export volumes are projected to increase from 7 million cases in 2014 to 12 million cases by 2020 and 24 million cases by 2030.

Significant investment supported by Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia has taken place in recent years in the expansion of existing facilities, development of new distilleries and marketing. As Irish Whiskey must, under EU and Irish law, be matured in wood for at least three years it will take some time for increased production to reach the market, but this should improve opportunities for the creation of a wholesale market. I would welcome any industry initiative to facilitate the development of a wholesale Irish Whiskey market but I do not have the power to compel individual distilling companies to set aside part of their production for such a market.

GLAS Payments

1656. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person's GLAS 2016 85% advance payment issued at a much reduced rate; if the reduced payment is as a result of an information technology problem in view of the fact the person was verbally advised by departmental officials; when the information technology problem will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28406/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases in relation to the Commonage parcel.

The 85% advance payment paid to the person named in June 2017 did not include any element of the commonage payment. The 2016 balancing payment which will issue in the near future will take account of the total balance due to the person named including the full commonage payment due.

Brexit Negotiations

1657. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to have discussions with his EU colleagues in the context of Brexit with a view to ensuring continued access for food exports as heretofore; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28423/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I fully recognise the potentially very significant difficulties that may arise for Irish agri-food exports as a result of Brexit. The agri-food sector is of critical importance to our economy, and particularly to the economy of rural areas given its wide regional spread - for example, in 2016 it employed approximately 173,000 people (8.6% of total employment), and the total value of agri-food exports was almost €12.2bn. I am therefore determined to safeguard its interests.

An important part of this process is the extensive work that I have undertaken in raising awareness of these issues at EU level. I have engaged in a series of bilateral meetings with my EU counterparts which are aimed at building alliances to ensure that agri-food issues are at the top of the EU negotiation agenda. To date I have had very fruitful meetings with my counterparts in Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Poland, France, Luxembourg, Austria and Belgium. Further meetings are being arranged for the coming weeks with counterparts from, for example, Spain and Italy. I have also had frequent discussions with Commissioner Hogan, and my officials have participated in meetings with the Barnier Task Force and with counterparts in the UK and other member states.

My Department and I remain very focused on supporting the food export industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry and with counterparts in the UK and other member states as the negotiations develop, and press Ireland's case at European level.

Food Exports

1658. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects to establish new markets for food or food products globally in the event of there being a diminution in access to the UK markets in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28424/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is of course an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. Indeed, this is all the more relevant after the UK's decision to leave the EU, which presents significant new challenges for the agri-food sector in particular.

For some products the dependence on the UK market is significant, and it will be extremely difficult to identify market opportunities of sufficient scale to entirely displace the UK. For this reason I have met with senior officials with retail multiples in the UK to assure them of the quality of Irish food and the continued commitment of Irish businesses to the UK market.

Nonetheless Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region. There is also potential for further market development in more mature markets, and my Department and its agencies will be focussed on maximising the potential for market development in the coming years.

In keeping with the priorities outlined in Food Wise 2025, I and Minister Doyle led trade missions to China, Singapore, Vietnam and South Korea in September 2016. In November I

also led a trade mission to Morocco, which was extended at senior official level to include Algeria. Earlier in 2016, senior officials accompanied a Bord Bia trade mission to Iran, and travelled on to Turkey and met with officials to discuss trade of live animals.

In February 2017 I also led a very successful Trade Mission to the Gulf Region. This covered the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

I am at present engaged in a trade mission to the United States and Mexico, which commenced on Monday, 19 June. This mission includes participants from across the agri-food sector and will feature extensive trade contacts as well as high level political discussions. Both of these markets have been identified by my Department as offering huge potential to the Irish agri-food sector. The US is the largest food and beverage market in the world and has a population of 324 million people. Around 35 million Americans claim Irish ancestry and many aspects of the American market are attractive to Irish exporters. Mexico has a population of 127 million, making it the eleventh-largest country in the world in population terms and the fifteenth-largest economy in the world, with projections that it will move into the top five by 2050.

It will also promote Ireland's reputation as a producer of high quality, safe and sustainably produced meat and dairy products. My Department will continue to seek out and identify new markets and I am ready to respond as appropriate to other opportunities that may arise.

I also recently announced additional market access resources in my Department in order to further support its efforts to increase the Irish footprint globally.

Dairy Sector

1659. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the dairy sector continues to develop in order to maximise employment and exports into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28425/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Market analysis predicts that medium term prospects for global dairy markets are good, with growth in world population and wealth expected to stimulate strong levels of demand for dairy products. More than 85% of Irish dairy production is exported to some 130 countries worldwide.

Bord Bia figures show that the value of Irish dairy and ingredient exports for the year 2016 increased by around 2% compared with 2015, despite a very difficult global context. CSO data shows an approximate 8% increase in the value of dairy exports for the period January to March 2017 compared with the same period in 2016, with the growth in value driven primarily by butter, cheese, whole milk and enriched dairy powder exports.

My Department, its agencies and I continue to work with industry to raise the profile of the Irish dairy sector in markets worldwide. This involves diversifying our trading relationships wherever possible, including emerging markets in the Far East, North Africa and elsewhere as well as deepening existing trading relationship. For example, dairy forms an integral part of the current trade mission to the USA and Mexico.

A key element of Ireland's marketing strategy is to optimise the already positive green image of Ireland in order to create a point of differentiation for Irish dairy products on international markets. In this context, the National Sustainability and Quality Scheme for the dairy sector aims to capitalise on Ireland's reputation for green, carbon efficient, high quality dairy production.

At processing level, Bord Bia's Origin Green Programme is providing a vehicle for industry to commit itself to sustainability targets. This pro-active approach to environmental sustainability has a strong resonance with procurement strategists of many multi-national food companies.

Supported by Government, the Irish dairy sector has succeeded in positioning itself as a major international player. We have seen industry announcements in relation to the development of supply arrangements between Irish companies and multi-national players in third countries, and the development of value added products which can maximise the value of our dairy output.

I am confident that the collaborative efforts of Government, the processing industry and the producers will ensure a thriving and sustainable dairy sector that can fully leverage the natural advantage of Ireland's grass-based production system.

Food Exports

1660. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which he and his Department continue to seek out new markets for beef, lamb and pig meat incorporating the use of the island of Ireland as single entity thus enabling the farming community, North and South, to have continued access to previously established markets without restriction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28426/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade.

There is significant potential for growth in agri-food exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region. We must also exploit any potential for growth in more mature markets and our efforts in relation to both of these objectives are all the more important given the decision of the UK to leave the EU.

In keeping with the priorities outlined in Food Wise 2025, Minister Doyle and I led trade missions to China, Singapore, Vietnam and South Korea in September 2016, Morocco in November 2016 and to the Gulf Region in 2017. In addition missions at senior official level have included Algeria, Iran and Turkey. I also hosted a number of high level visits from countries outside of the EU including the Chinese Minister for Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, the Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister, and most recently a technical delegation from South Korea.

Discussions with these and other third countries take place on a Government to Government basis, and therefore between the competent authorities in this State and those in the relevant third country.

Food Exports

1661. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which the mushroom growing sector, North and South, can expect to rely on continued access to all previously established markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28427/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The mushroom sector is heavily dependent on the UK market with approximately 85% of Irish mush-

rooms destined for that market each year. Irish mushrooms account for approximately one third of all mushrooms consumed in the UK.

Access arrangements for the UK market post-Brexit will depend on the outcome of the UK's Brexit negotiations with the EU. During these negotiations the Irish Government's position will be to seek to minimise the impact of Brexit on existing trade for all Irish exports including mushrooms.

In addition my Department will ensure Bord Bia is provided with the necessary funds to support promotion of Irish food and drink on all markets. Indeed Bord Bia is currently engaged in a mushroom industry co-funded promotion campaign on the Irish and UK markets. This is designed to maintain the momentum achieved over the recent EU co-funded mushroom promotion campaigns.

Poultry Industry

1662. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which the poultry sector throughout the island of Ireland can expect to retain access to previously established markets in the European Union and beyond; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28428/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is working on expanding market access for beef, sheepmeat, pigmeat, poultry and cooked meats across a range of markets. In tandem, we continue to work to maintain existing markets as well as to simplify certification procedures and improve certification conditions in a number of existing markets.

For example, in 2016 my Department reached agreement with the veterinary authorities in Singapore to amend the veterinary health certificate for the export of poultry meat in order to allow for the inclusion of poultry hatched and reared in either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland, and slaughtered in the Republic of Ireland. This reflects the cross border nature of the poultry business in Ireland.

In 2016 the value of Irish poultry meat exports was estimated at €275 million. Exports to the UK accounted for 84% of exports by value while exports to the rest of the European Union accounted for 8% of exports by value. Exports to third countries accounted for the remaining 8% of exports by value. Therefore it is clear that the poultry sector is one which has an important export outlet in the UK. In all of my engagements with EU counterparts and the EU Negotiating team I have been making clear our demand for continued unfettered access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures, as well as keeping the UK market viable for Irish producers by minimising the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries.

The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the sector, as evidenced by its placement right at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development over the coming decade. My Department is always looking for new market access opportunities which will enhance our options for exports to third countries in the future. The priorities of the industry are assessed through the form of quarterly meetings with relevant stakeholders.

Horse Racing Industry Development

1663. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects the sporting horse non-thoroughbred industry to continue to prosper here into the future notwithstanding ongoing geopolitical changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28430/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As part of my Department's strategy to assist the development of the sector, it has commissioned a consultancy report on the structures of Horse Sport Ireland with a view to ensure that the industry has the optimum organisation to avail of development opportunities and meet challenges as they arise.

I assume the Deputy is referring to the potential impact of Brexit on the Sport Horse Sector. In this regard, my Department is playing its part in efforts to ensure that the an agreement with the UK upon its exit from the European Union does not disrupt trade or regulation in the equine sector. In this context my Department has been in regular contact over the last year with counterpart administrations in London and Belfast and as recently as the 9th of June last, hosted an all-Ireland sectorial dialogue which included the leading representatives of the sport horse industry on the island of Ireland.

Fishing Industry

1664. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects to be in a position to ensure maximum employment to derive from the fishing industry including the entitlement for Irish trawlers to continue to fish in traditional waters in keeping with established practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28431/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Achieving maximum employment from the fishing industry is intrinsically linked to ensuring the long term sustainability of the industry, both economically and environmentally. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework to achieve these goals.

A key element of the CFP is the setting of fishing levels on the basis of MSY (Maximum Sustainable Yield). When stocks are fished at MSY it should, ultimately, lead to healthy fish stocks, higher quotas for both Irish and EU fishermen and lead to more sustainable fishing patterns. The achievement of MSY for all commercial fish stocks is being phased in gradually and is due to be complete by 2020 at the latest. This will result in more fish being left in the sea to mature and reproduce leading to increased abundance of fish, and over time to higher quotas for Irish fishermen. This, in turn, will add to the employment prospects for fishermen, the processors and ancillary sectors.

The EU Commission has noted that the state of fish stocks in European Atlantic and nearby waters continues to improve which I believe indicates that we are continuing to see the benefits of prudent and responsible fisheries management practices. At the most recent December Council, I was pleased to negotiate a package that secured 233,500 tonnes of quotas worth €280 million for Irish fishermen for 2017. The outcome was universally welcomed by the fishing sector and is representative of the robust health of our fishing industry.

The ongoing implementation the landing obligation, which began in 2015 will also contribute to an improvement in the state of the stocks of importance to Ireland and will result in increased fishing opportunities for the Irish fishing industry.

In terms of the entitlement for Irish trawlers to continue to fish in traditional waters, the most immediate potential threat is the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. At this stage it is

impossible to say with certainty what impact Brexit will have on the Irish fishing industry as we don't know yet what changes the UK may seek to the current arrangements.

Any attempt by the UK to alter the status quo at the expense of Ireland and others must, and will be, resisted strenuously.

I am and will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

I am also continuing to work closely with my European colleagues to ensure that fisheries remain a top priority in the negotiations to come. Protecting existing shares and access are top priorities for the fishing Member States.

My overarching goal for Ireland's fishing industry is to ensure a sustainable, profitable and self-reliant industry that protects and enhances the social and economic fabric of rural coastal communities dependent on the seafood sector, while balancing these objectives with the need to safeguard fish stocks for future generations.

Agriculture Industry

1665. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the development and growth of deer farming and the venison sector with particular reference to developments abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28432/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Deer farming in this country is an alternative enterprise which is highly dependent on the dynamics of supply and demand which affect all agricultural production systems. In 1996 there were approximately 500 deer farms in Ireland with 20,000 deer, but numbers have declined sharply since that time. At present there are only a small number of farmers in Ireland supplying deer for meat production, which cater to the niche market available.

The viability of the sector is reliant upon producers and companies ensuring that a market exists for their product, an objective which Bord Bia assists in by identifying and developing potential market outlets.

There has been some recent growth in game (venison) market albeit from a very low base. This growth has been achieved as a result of improved distribution for game meats, especially in supermarkets. Game and exotic meats currently occupy a premium, niche segment of the market. Whilst there are niche opportunities to compete with the larger premium segment of the red meat/poultry categories, it is important to note that demand is seasonal, with the greatest concentration of retail shelf space dedicated to game in the Winter/Christmas period.

My Department has approved one factory for the slaughter of deer in Ireland, and two game handling plants. There may also be outlets for processing of venison in Local Authority approved plants, but this would be a matter for the Local Authority concerned.

Animal Welfare

1666. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which his Department continues to monitor all aspects of animal welfare including

canine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28435/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 is the main legal instrument available to my Department to enforce animal welfare standards. The Act puts clear obligations on owners regarding the need to look after animals under their care.

My Department employs a large team of veterinary inspectors to enforce the provisions of the Act. Inspections, both announced and unannounced, are undertaken on a regular basis to ensure that the requirements of the Act are strictly adhered to. These inspections are scheduled on both a random and targeted basis. My Department also operates an anonymous helpline through which members of the public can express animal welfare concerns. These reports are promptly examined by trained veterinary staff countrywide and corrective action is taken in those cases where the Act has been breached. The Act also provides for severe penalties in the event of successful prosecutions.

The Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) was established by my Department in February 2002 on a non-statutory basis. It has been instrumental in promoting animal welfare in a practical way and providing a forum for different interest groups to meet, exchange views and reach consensus on the various challenges relating to animal welfare on farms.

While my Department remains the central reporting point for animal welfare concerns, it also works collaboratively on a range of issues with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Under Section 37(2) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act, 2013, the manager of a local authority may appoint authorised officers to exercise functions conferred on them for the purposes of enforcing the Act.

One area of such co-operation is the governance of canine welfare. A joint inspection regime of dog breeding establishments, involving the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Local Authority Veterinary Service, took place in 2015 for the purpose of inspection and follow up action. While a very high percentage of inspections found the conditions of the animals to comply fully with the Act, corrective action was taken where necessary following the discovery of individual cases of non-compliance (mainly infrastructural in nature).

My Department also liaises on a daily basis with Local Authorities in relation to the enforcement of the Control of Horses Act 1996. The development of urban / traveller horse projects is one outcome of this co-operation. These projects seek to reduce the amount of stray horses and educate young people in the care of animals. I am glad to report a major improvement in horse welfare outcomes in recent years.

The Deputy may be assured that this level of monitoring, enforcement and education will remain in place in the future, both by my Department and the State agencies.

GLAS Data

1667. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 who have received 85% of their total 2016 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28438/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Initial pro-

cessing of every GLAS I and II case for 2016 payment has been completed. Approximately 1,000 applicants have been informed that further information is required of them before their application can be advanced and it is now a matter for the applicant together with their Advisor to consider how they wish to proceed.

The information requested is set out below on a county by county basis for GLAS 1 and GLAS II applicants who have received a payment to date or will be paid in the next payment run by the Department in the coming days. In total this represents 95% of all applications received.

County	No of Applicants paid to date	No of Applicants Cleared for payment
Carlow	383	1
Cavan	1,296	2
Clare	2,224	1
Cork	3,007	7
Donegal	2,849	4
Dublin	71	1
Galway	4,157	11
Kerry	2,584	3
Kildare	304	1
Kilkenny	611	1
Laois	538	2
Leitrim	1,380	-
Limerick	1,303	1
Longford	830	-
Louth	210	1
Mayo	3,639	6
Meath	589	2
Monaghan	708	1
Offaly	718	1
Roscommon	2,008	2
Sligo	1,266	1
Tipperary	1,562	2
Waterford	450	2
Westmeath	877	1
Wexford	936	1
Wicklow	450	1
	34,950	56

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

1668. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied for AEOS who have received their total 2016 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 2016 payment; the number of AEOS recipients that have yet to receive payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28439/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): AEOS II participants completed their 5-year contracts on 31 December 2016. Under the EU Regulations governing this Scheme and all other area-based payment schemes, a full checks, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System must take place before payment can issue. As all AEOS II participants will be receiving their final payments under the scheme, re-checks on payments made for all scheme years must be completed before final payment can be

processed. All cases cleared for payment are paid on a weekly basis.

County	Totals	Paid	Awaiting Processing
Carlow	49	45	4
Cavan	244	227	17
Clare	556	511	45
Cork	428	395	33
Donegal	1360	1,263	97
Dublin	9	9	0
Galway	1245	1,157	88
Kerry	568	513	55
Kildare	39	36	3
Kilkenny	109	99	10
Laois	80	69	11
Leitrim	430	400	30
Limerick	224	190	34
Longford	89	77	12
Louth	41	39	2
Mayo	1399	1,302	97
Meath	83	75	8
Monaghan	151	124	27
Offaly	110	104	6
Roscommon	478	443	35
Sligo	335	303	32
Tipperary	245	212	33
Waterford	82	73	9
Westmeath	122	102	20
Wexford	84	59	25
Wicklow	80	69	11
Totals	8640	7,896	744

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1669. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Teagasc advisors under the knowledge transfer group scheme can charge a fee greater than €500 for acting as facilitators to groups under the scheme. [28440/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Knowledge Transfer Programme under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 is delivered by a network of approved Knowledge Transfer Facilitators. Facilitators who meet their commitment under the programme are due a payment per participant of €500 for each year of the three year programme. Payment to facilitators under the programme covers the cost of preparing for and holding meetings as well as the time they spend producing an individualised Farm Improvement Plan for each farmer participant. My Department does not require a participant under the Knowledge Transfer Programme to be a client of Teagasc. It was open to participants to enrol in a group facilitated by either a private or Teagasc advisor.

In addition to its involvement in the Knowledge Transfer Programme, Teagasc also provide an extensive range of Advisory Services to Ireland's farmers, including 45,000 direct contracts. The primary purpose is to maximise the income and sustainability of farm families within rural communities through improved farm efficiency, based on the transfer of knowledge, new technologies and best practice to all sectors of the industry. The cost of delivering these services is

partially borne by the State in the form of an annual Grant-in-Aid, with the balance provided by fees charged to farmers, and some programme support from industry – mainly dairy processing co-ops.

Departmental Meetings

1670. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the costs associated with running and facilitating the various round table forums in each sector including beef, dairy, tillage and so on, in tabular form. [28441/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2017, I facilitated meetings of roundtable forums for the beef, dairy and tillage sectors. These forums have built on the success of the Beef Roundtable which had its first meeting in April 2014.

Roundtable forums bring together all stakeholders for constructive discussion on how the various sectors in Irish agriculture can develop and meet challenges as they arise, with the overall aim of realising the objectives laid down for them in Food Wise 2025.

Costs are kept to a minimum including holding meetings in-house wherever possible. The total cost to date is €3,858.13 – the breakdown per sector reflects the number of meetings per sector held to date.

The costs of the roundtable meetings that have been held thus far are as follows:

	€		€		€
Beef Round Table Costs	€3,095.13	Dairy Round Table Costs	€520	Tillage Round Table Costs	€243

Departmental Agencies Funding

1671. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 230 of 25 May 2017, the amount of Exchequer funding comprised in the €61 million figure quoted for Bord Bia's budget. [28442/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The amount of exchequer funding comprised in the sum of €61 million is €43,925,000 as follows:

Bord Bia 2017 Exchequer Funding	Total
Grant	€34,492,000
Beef Quality Assurance Scheme	€6,000,000
Healthy Eating Initiative (Food Dudes)	€3,133,000
Organic Funding	€300,000
TOTAL	€43,925,000

The balance comprises income from:

	€
Statutory Levy on cattle, sheep and pigs (Slaughter and live exports)	€5,417,000
EU Receipts	€1,774,000

Industry Contributions	€9,597,000
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(Source: An Bord Bia Agency Statement for Vote 30 - Agriculture, Food & the Marine, 2017 Estimates)

Departmental Agencies Funding

1672. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the Exchequer funding allocated to date in 2017 to each State agency under his aegis, including Bord Bia, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the National Milk Agency, Teagasc and the Marine Institute, in tabular form [28443/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy, broken down under non-commercial and commercial State Agencies, is set out below:

The National Milk Agency is not in receipt of any funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Non-Commercial State Agencies

			2017 Allocation			Position at May 31st	
Subhead	Agency	Current €000	Capital €000	Total €000	Current €000	Capital €000	Total €000
C..5	Teagasc	124,920	3,210	128,130	64,360	1,650	66,010
C..6	Bord Bia	34,492	0	34,492	14,153	0	14,153
D.4	Marine Institute	21,563	10,000	31,563	10,530	2,882	13,412
D.5	Bord Iascaigh Mhara	26,088	18,000	44,088	6,625	953	7,578
D.6	Sea Fisheries Protection Authority	11,800	1,000	12,800	4,195	115	4,310

Commercial State Agencies

			2017 Allocation			Position at 31st May	
Subhead	Agency	Current €000	Capital €000	Total €000	Current €000	Capital €000	Total €000
C.7	Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund	58,756	21,244	80,000	36,500	10,600	47,100
Of which:	Horse Racing Ireland	42,800	21,200	64,000	25,000	10,600	35,600
	Bord na gCon	15,956	44	16,000	11,500	0	11,500

Market Access

1673. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 230 of 25 May 2017, the number of full time and part time staff working in the dedicated market access unit established within the meat and milk policy division; and the yearly cost of the unit including staffing costs. [28444/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's work on developing market access involves inputs across a range of Divisions in relation to technical certification matters, the coordination of inward audit missions from third country authorities, the organisation of trade missions, engagement with industry and a range of other activities.

These activities, which are carried out by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, are coordinated by a Market Access Unit comprising 6 members of staff.

The staffing complement of this unit consists of a range of grades from CO to AP reporting to a PO and ASG with responsibility in this area. However, as noted above market access related activity is in fact carried out by a much larger number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff across the Department.

The full time equivalent (FTE) staff complement for the market access unit of Meat and Milk Policy Division is 1 Assistant Principal (AP), 1 Higher Executive Officer (HEO), 1 Administrative Officer (AO), 2 Executive Officer (EO's) and 1 Clerical Officer (CO).

The revised payscales with effect from 1 April 2017 for General Service grades are as follows: AP €62,966 to €74,657, HEO €44,816 to €56,415, AO €29,742 to €56,415, EO €27,383 to €46,616, CO €23,565 to 36,515.

My Department will continue to review the staff complement in this area and will deploy the appropriate resources as the need arises.

Dairy Sector

1674. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a review of the public intervention instrument and reference threshold levels for butter and skimmed milk powder as permitted under CAP regulation 1308/2013; if he has had discussions at European level in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28445/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Whilst dairy markets are currently broadly stable, the Deputy will be aware that between mid 2014 and the end of 2016 dairy markets experienced significant difficulties. During that phase of volatility, the EU Commission, both prompted and supported by Ireland, among other Member States, responded to these difficulties through the deployment of support measures, including intervention provided for under the CAP.

Ireland's industry placed some 36,000 tonnes of skimmed milk powder (SMP) into intervention between September 2015 and the end of 2016. During this period, the EU Commission, supported by Ireland and other Member States, raised the volume thresholds for fixed-price intervention for SMP on a number of occasions. The increased volume thresholds for SMP of 350,000 tonnes and a commitment to avoid market disruption when releasing product have had a stabilising effect on the market in late 2016 and early 2017.

Provisions in the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulations indicate that the refer-

ence thresholds and by extension reference prices for intervention shall be kept under review by the Commission, taking account of objective criteria, notably developments in production, costs of production and market trends. This issue was discussed at EU level during the most recent period of volatility. However, the mechanism for updating the reference thresholds is ordinary legislative procedure which it was indicated would take 18 months. Thus the decision was to utilise enhanced supports in other areas which would have more immediate impact.

The issue of critical importance at present is that the release of stocks of SMP is managed in a way that does not de-stabilise the market, particularly through the peak phase of production in Ireland and the EU. I am satisfied to date that the Commission has managed these stocks in a prudent and sensible manner.

European Solidarity Corps

1675. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the RDP measure or sub measure for which a possible scheme under the European solidarity corps programme could be examined for rollout. [28446/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Solidarity Corps Programme was announced by the European Commission in September 2016 and was first launched in December 2016. Under the EAFRD, measure 16, 19 and 20 have been suggested as those most appropriate measures for the European Solidarity Corps. However, there are currently no plans to introduce a new measure under Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 in relation to the European Solidarity Corps Programme.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

1676. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he has taken and the contributions he has made at the recent EU Agriculture Ministers meeting following moves by the European Parliament's environment committee to make it more difficult to use forests and grasslands to offset emissions cuts under the EU's draft 2030 plan. [28447/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The challenge of feeding an increasing world population, which is set to grow by 2 billion by 2050, in a sustainable manner whilst reducing GHG emissions has been recognised as uniquely challenging for the Agricultural sector.

There must be a coherent approach to the twin challenges of climate change and food security that does not force us to reduce our sustainable production of food. Such an approach is clearly recognised in the EU Council Conclusions of October 2014 and in the Paris Agreement which outlines that efforts to limit global temperature increases to less than 2 degrees and to pursue 1.5 degrees must do so in a manner that does not threaten food production. From the forestry perspective of land use, the Paris Agreement includes a strong recognition of the role of forests in mitigating climate change and the need to account for both emissions and removals.

These objectives are in line also with the Government's stated long-term ambition for the sector-an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production.

Therefore, maintaining the current Commission proposal, which allows Ireland the poten-

tial to use up to a cap equivalent to 5.6% of 2005 emissions (2.7 Mt CO₂eq per annum) from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) from the 280mt EU flexibility in order to meet its emission reduction requirements, is of major importance to Ireland. This flexibility is based on a combined contribution of net afforestation and cropland and grassland management activities.

We continue to emphasise that the flexibility from the land use sector should not be seen as an offsetting proposal but rather as an effort to broaden the “toolbox” of abatement options available to achieve targets. This is particularly the case for Member States where existing abatement measures are costly and action in the LULUCF sector, that encourages removals and limits emissions, may present a more cost effective option.

Likewise, the starting point is critical to the achievement of a cost efficient burden which reflects the reality of our end-point in 2020 and not the assumption that we have reached our -20% target.

Farm Inspections

1677. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the operational details for the yellow card system in place for farm inspections. [28448/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A new Penalty Regime and “Yellow Card” system was introduced in respect of land eligibility requirements as part of an overall suite of measures under the Simplification Process of the CAP. These provisions applied from the 2016 Scheme Year and are applicable to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the Young Farmers Scheme (YFS), the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme and Areas of Specific Constraints (ASC) Islands Scheme, only. The provisions aim to simplify the process and reduce the penalty levels applied under these schemes.

The new penalty regime reduces the level of penalty to be applied in cases where area over-declarations greater than 3% or 2 hectares are determined. This provision applies to all relevant cases irrespective of how the over-declaration is determined.

The “Yellow Card” provision applies to those cases where a determined over-declaration in area is greater than 3% or 2 hectares, but does not exceed 10%. For such cases the penalty will be further reduced by 50%, subject to specific criteria.

The additional criteria attaching to the provision is that an applicant can only avail of the “Yellow Card” once per individual scheme and furthermore, where an applicant is found to have an area over-declaration resulting in a penalty in the following year, they will be required to pay-back the value of the 50% reduction applied in the previous year, in addition to the penalty being applied for the current year. There is also a requirement for inspections in the following year on those applicants who declare an area greater than the area determined in the previous year following an inspection.

Under the Cross Compliance regime, there is a provision in the governing regulations that, where a breach of any of the requirements is deemed to be minor and remedial action is taken within a specified period, no monetary sanction will apply.

Fishing Licences

1678. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine his views on amending the existing regime pertaining to fishing boat licences that restrict inshore fishermen from engaging in marine tourism activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28449/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am advised by the Licensing Authority for Sea Fishing Boats that fishing boat licence conditions do not restrict inshore fishermen from engaging in marine tourism activities.

The Marine Survey Office (MSO), Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has full responsibility for the issue of Passenger Boat Licences (e.g. vessels which offer angling/charter trips). MSO rules do not permit vessels that are entered on the Register of Fishing Boats to be licensed as Passenger Vessels. Accordingly, the matter raised is a matter for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Early Retirement Scheme

1679. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a new early retirement scheme for farmers; and if there is a funding measure or submeasure available for same. [28450/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Early Retirement Scheme was suspended in 2008. It was reopened briefly in September 2009, with limited additional funding, to accommodate farmers who had applications completed or close to completion at the time of suspension. I have no plans to re-open this scheme or introduce another similar scheme at this time. I can confirm there is no funding available for a new Early Retirement Scheme at this time.

In recent years the priority of my Department has shifted to the encouragement of generational change for farmers. The focus under the 2014 - 2020 Rural Development Programme is for an enhanced capital investment scheme for young trained farmers. This new Scheme provides grant aid at a rate of 60% of the cost of the investment, compared to the standard grant rate of 40%, and is an important support and encouragement to young farmers starting in agriculture for the first time.

Rural Development Programme

1680. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it is technically possible to introduce a suckler cow scheme under the animal welfare measure or submeasure in the rural development programme. [28451/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Supports for the suckler sector, or indeed any other sector, have to be considered in the overall context of Ireland's current Rural Development Programme (RDP), taking into account our existing budgetary commitments under the programme.

It may be technically possible to provide assistance to the suckler cow sector under the animal welfare measure in the Rural Development Regulation. Any such assistance could only be funded on a costs incurred and income foregone basis, would have to be funded from within the Rural Development Programme envelope. It would also require a significant amendment to that Programme and be subject to the approval of the European Commission.

The Rural Development Programme already provides significant support for the Suck-

ler sector. Through Pillar II of the CAP some €300 million of funding over a six year period has been targeted at the Irish suckler herd through the Bovine Data Genomics Programme (BDGP). In response to significant demand, earlier this year I reopened the BDGP programme for new entrants. This clearly reflects the success of this programme which targets improving both the environmental footprint and also the profitability of the suckler herd through improving the genetic merit in participating herds. The effects of improving the genetic merit of the suckler herds are cumulative and permanent. It is my belief that this type of scheme which sees the application of leading scientific technology applied in a practical manner at farm level is the most appropriate means of providing support to the suckler sector.

While BDGP is the main support, there are a range of further supports provided to suckler farmers under the RDP such as Knowledge Transfer Groups, GLAS, TAMS and supports to ANCs.

TB Eradication Scheme

1681. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the tuberculosis eradication programme movement of contiguous herds which is automatically restricted to a four months test period; his plans to review this and increase the time limit in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28453/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Herds which are contiguous to the farm fragment linked to a high risk breakdown are put on a contiguous test programme. However, there is normally an interval of several weeks following a herd breakdown before a contiguous herd is tested. Previously during this interval, farmers were free to trade their animals and therefore there was a risk of spreading TB from the sale of such animals to clear herds. Statistics available to my Department show that animals in herds which are contiguous to high risk breakdowns are 3 times more likely to have TB infected animals than “normal” herds, indicating that the risk of TB spreading from herds which are contiguous to high risk breakdowns is very significant.

As a result, my Department introduced controls on movement from contiguous herds such that herds which have not had a full herd test within the previous 4 months are prevented from selling cattle on the open market pending a full clear herd test. However, such herds are permitted to move cattle direct to slaughter and to buy-in cattle under permit. They are immediately de-restricted once they have passed a TB herd test. I should point out that the new controls only apply to herds which are identified as relevant to the breakdown following an epidemiological investigation. I have no plans to review this policy or to increase the time limit in place.

Fish Exports

1682. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of fish exports to Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28455/17]

1683. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of fish imports from Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28456/17]

1684. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of fish exports to the UK, excluding Northern Ireland, in 2015

and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28457/17]

1685. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of fish imports from the UK excluding Northern Ireland in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28458/17]

1686. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the volume and value of fish exports to all countries on an annual basis in each of the years 2010 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28459/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1682 to 1686, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the tables.

Table 1

Fisheries Exports to Great Britain and Northern Ireland*

	2014		2015		2016		Jan-Mar 2017	
Country	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
Great Britain	48,228	18,105	48,605	19,072	54,483	18,800	10,938	3,539
Northern Ireland	8,023	3,327	8,721	2,504	9,779	3,486	1,523	396
Total	56,251	21,432	57,326	21,576	64,262	22,286	12,461	3,936
Fisheries Imports from Great Britain and Northern Ireland*								
	2014		2015		2016		Jan-Mar 2017	
Country	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes	€ 000	Tonnes
Great Britain	128,994	26,125	149,557	28,885	149,527	32,470	34,537	7,832
Northern Ireland	16,265	4,713	15,344	3,867	16,065	4,150	3,756	926
Total	145,260	30,838	164,901	32,752	165,592	36,620	38,293	8,758

Table 2

*Fisheries Global Exports Value

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000
Fish	370,523	416,102	523,412	480,552	531,414	567,600	554,715

*Fisheries Global Imports Value							
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000	€ 000
Fish	167,159	189,639	211,078	211,298	236,304	265,399	263,239

Table 3

Fisheries Global Exports Volume*

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Fish	221,607	180,201	282,862	243,878	259,481	251,995	201,824
Fisheries Global Imports Volume*							
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Fish	75,630	51,919	118,054	75,228	69,335	69,572	56,123

* Figures have been provided by the CSO

Fish Exports

1687. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made on targets to increase fish exports in volume and value terms as per Foodwise 2025. [28460/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While Food Harvest 2020 included a target for total seafood sales of €1 billion by 2020 (export and domestic), Food Wise 2025 does not include a specific export growth (or total sales) target for seafood.

Seafood exports grew by 52% in value terms between 2010 and 2016, from €370 million to €563 million. Exports decreased by 2% in 2016, arising from a volume decrease of 21%, which was offset by an average increase in unit price of 24%, demonstrating the on-going strength of demand in most key markets. Total seafood sales, including domestic sales of €350 million, were €913 million in 2016, indicating a positive outlook for achievement of the 2020 Food Harvest target of €1 billion in sales.

My Department's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme was launched in 2016. That Programme includes a number of key initiatives to foster the growth of seafood sales and to enhance the value added from our fish stocks. The EMFF Programme is providing €5 million to Bord Bia to enhance its existing seafood promotion work programme, while the Programme is providing €24 million to Bord Iascaigh Mhara to deliver a suite of support schemes to the seafood processing sector. A Seafood Innovation & Business Planning Scheme supports new product development and other innovation initiatives, together with supports for business planning and market research. A Seafood Scaling & New Market Development Scheme supports seafood processors to work collectively to develop new markets and route to market structures. A Seafood Processing Capital Investment Scheme supports capital investment by seafood processors in equipment and premises to enhance the value of seafood raw material through value added processing.

Livestock Issues

1688. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has examined regulations regarding feedlots in the United States of America with respect to the setting here. [28461/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the first instance feed lots would have to meet the requirements of planning laws which are a matter for the Local Authorities. Under EU Directive 98/58/EC for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes all livestock enterprises are subject to welfare inspections by officials of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

Food Wise 2025 Strategy

1689. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether Food Wise 2025 should be reviewed in view of the fact that its forecasts and targets were predicated on the UK remaining in the EU and that the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has commenced a review of Enterprise 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28462/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agrifood sector, identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectorial recommendations.

The implementation process for any strategy is vital for its success. I chair the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), with high level representatives from all the relevant Departments and State agencies. The committee reviews progress on detailed actions on a quarterly basis, in order to identify and solve problems quickly. Stakeholders regularly present to the committee meetings on their priorities for particular sectors or themes and by the end of this year, the HLIC will have reviewed in detail progress on the five cross-cutting themes and the eleven individual sectors outlined in Food Wise 2025.

In light of the UK vote to leave the EU, Brexit has been included as a standard item on the agenda of each meeting of the HLIC. It is clear that driving the implementation of the Food Wise recommendations, particularly those related to market development, competitiveness and innovation, will assume even greater importance in the light of the UK decision.

I will be launching Steps to Success 2017, the second progress report on Food Wise 2025, next month.

Fish Landings

1690. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the percentage of landings made from the UK exclusive economic zone for each specific fishing stock in tabular form. [28463/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Main species subject to quota limits that are partially caught in UK waters by Irish vessels. (All data provided by the Marine Institute)

- The average annual Irish landings for the years 2011-15 are given in tonnes and value

(M€).

- The estimated Irish landings taken from UK waters are given in tonnes and value (M€) as well as the percentage of the total Irish landings that were taken from UK waters by weight (%wt) and by value (%€).

- The last two columns are generally the same because a constant price was assumed for each species; however they can differ for groups of species or totals.

- Some species are divided into distinct stocks by ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) areas e.g. Haddock in the area West of Scotland (Area 5, 6a) and in the Celtic Sea (Area 7bce-k)

Species		Total Irish landings 2011-15				Irish landings from UK EEZ
Stock	Tonnes	M€	Tonnes	M€	%wt	%€
Mackerel	74,981	59.0	47,748	37.6	64%	64%
Areas 2,5-8,12,14	48,750	38.4	21,613	17.0	44%	44%
Special condition 4a	26,138	20.6	26,057	20.5	100%	100%
Nephrops	9,322	46.6	3,741	18.7	40%	40%
Area 7	9,283	46.4	3,709	18.5	40%	40%
Areas 5b,6	38	0.2	31	0.2	82%	82%
Horse mackerel	36,800	22.0	10,263	6.1	28%	28%
Areas 2,4-8,12,14	36,800	22.0	10,263	6.1	28%	28%
Herring	27,633	10.5	8,654	3.3	31%	31%
Areas 5,6	2,762	1.0	2,450	0.9	89%	89%
Areas 6aS,7bc	2,416	0.9	57	0.0	2%	2%
Area 7a	43	0.0	32	0.0	73%	73%
Area 7g-k	19,078	7.2	6,053	2.3	32%	32%
Anglerfish	3,893	13.0	701	2.3	18%	18%
Area 7	3,312	11.1	595	2.0	18%	18%
Areas 5,6,12,14	580	1.9	105	0.4	18%	18%
Megrim	3,144	9.4	721	2.1	23%	23%
Area 7	2,723	8.1	561	1.7	21%	21%
Areas 5,6,12,14	421	1.3	160	0.5	38%	38%
Whiting	6,334	7.2	1,428	1.6	23%	23%
Areas 5,6,12,14	105	0.1	35	0.0	34%	34%
Area 7a	10	0.0	4	0.0	44%	44%
Area 7b-k	6,219	7.1	1,388	1.6	22%	22%

Table contd.

Species		Total Irish landings 2011-15				Irish landings from UK EEZ
Stock	Tonnes	M€	Tonnes	M€	%wt	%€
Haddock	4,097	5.9	753	1.1	18%	18%
Area 5,6a	670	1.0	158	0.2	24%	24%
Areas 6b,12,14	108	0.2	72	0.1	67%	67%
Area 7a	86	0.1	43	0.1	50%	50%
Area 7bce-k	3,224	4.6	481	0.7	15%	15%
Boarfish	36,165	5.1	6,349	0.9	18%	18%
Areas 6,7,8	36,165	5.1	6,349	0.9	18%	18%
Cod	1,671	3.8	395	0.9	24%	24%
Areas 5E,6a	20	0.0	3	0.0	16%	16%
Areas 5W,6b,12,14	5	0.0	4	0.0	90%	90%
Area 7a	119	0.3	48	0.1	40%	40%
Area 7bce-k	1,349	3.0	340	0.8	25%	25%
Hake	2,195	6.3	176	0.5	8%	8%
Areas 5,6,7,12,14	2,194	6.3	175	0.5	8%	8%
Sole	204	1.9	35	0.3	17%	17%
Areas 5,6,12,14	14	0.1	1	0.0	5%	5%
Area 7a	42	0.4	18	0.2	43%	43%
Area 7bc	29	0.3	0	0.0	0%	0%
Area 7fg	36	0.3	14	0.1	38%	38%
Area 7h-k	83	0.8	2	0.0	3%	3%
Blue whiting	13,629	7.0	309	0.2	2%	2%
Areas 1-7,8,12,14	13,628	7.0	309	0.2	2%	2%
Plaice	322	0.6	62	0.1	19%	19%
Areas 5,6,12,14	21	0.0	5	0.0	26%	26%
Area 7a	139	0.3	42	0.1	30%	30%
Areas 7bc	17	0.0	0	0.0	0%	0%
Areas 7fg	75	0.1	10	0.0	13%	13%
Areas 7hjk	69	0.1	5	0.0	7%	7%
Saithe	1,167	1.3	90	0.1	8%	8%
Areas 5,6,12,14	244	0.3	37	0.0	15%	15%
Areas 7-10	922	1.0	53	0.1	6%	6%
Other TAC species	13,107	11.2	502	0.6	4%	5%
Total TAC species	234,663	210.7	81,927	76.4	35%	36%

Main non-TAC species that are partially caught in UK waters by Irish vessels.

- The average annual Irish landings for the years 2011-15 are given in tonnes and value (M€).

- The estimated Irish landings taken from UK waters are also given in tonnes, value (M€) as well as the percentage of the total Irish landings that were taken from UK waters by weight (%wt) and by value (%€).

- The last two columns are generally the same because a constant price was assumed for each species; however they can differ for groups of species or totals.

Species	Irish landings 2011-15		Irish landings from UK EEZ			
	Tonnes	M€	Tonnes	M€	%wt	%€
Scallops	2,653	7.6	1,115	3.2	42%	42%
Whelk	1,462	1.9	347	0.4	24%	24%
Edible crab	6,154	9.0	212	0.3	3%	3%
Witch	593	1.1	125	0.2	21%	21%
Squid	169	0.6	57	0.2	33%	39%
Lemon sole	435	1.1	76	0.2	17%	17%
Turbot	174	1.5	20	0.2	11%	11%
John dory	143	0.6	28	0.1	19%	19%
Razor clams	481	2.1	26	0.1	5%	5%
Other species	10,829	14.9	918	0.9	8%	6%
Total	23,095	40.2	2,924	5.9	13%	15%

Food Harvest 2020 Strategy

1691. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the data with respect to progress on attaining baseline targets set down for the agrifood sector and in each sector available by the Food Harvest 2020 strategy regarding new jobs to be created, primary output, exports levels and value added; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28465/17]

1692. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the data with respect to progress on attaining baseline targets set down for the agrifood sector and in each sector where available by the Food Wise 2025 strategy, in relation to new jobs to be created, primary output, exports levels and value added [28466/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1691 and 1692 together.

The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of primary output by 33% and agrifood exports by 40% (both from a 2007-09 average baseline); and to increase value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline). In addition to these value increases, the dairy industry targeted a 50% increase in milk production by 2020, to be progressed following the abolition of milk quotas in April 2016.

Progress on those targets was monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The fourth annual report “Milestones for Success 2014”, published in September 2014, showed that the sector had achieved very significant progress on these targets and illustrated the manner in which the Food Harvest 2020 vision of ‘smart, green, growth’ is being attained. The latest data available show growth of 36% for both primary production and exports (based on 2016 data), and 47% for value added (latest available data 2014), versus the baseline period.

Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agrifood sector published in July 2015, is the successor to the Food Harvest strategy. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food

Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectorial recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agrifood exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agrifood sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development. Realising these growth projections will be challenging, but I am confident that they can be achieved.

In July last year, I launched the first annual progress report of Food Wise 2025: Steps to Success 2016. Food Wise Steps to Success showed that, of the 330 detailed actions which were due to commence in 2015 or 2016, 28% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 67% have commenced and are progressing well. I believe that this is a good start and I will press on to get as many actions as possible completed within the next year.

Next month, I will launch the second annual progress report of Food Wise 2025: Steps to Success 2017.

Food Wise 2025 Strategy

1693. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of meetings of the Food Wise 2025 high level implementation group in the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of meetings planned in 2017; the number of meetings planned for the remaining years of the strategy, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28467/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Food-Wise 2025 High Level Implementation Committee has had the following meetings to date since the publication of the strategy in July 2015:

- 2015 (from September): two meetings
- 2016: six meetings
- 2017 to date: two meetings

The next meeting of the HLIC will be on 28 June. It is planned to have at least two more meetings before the end of the year. For the remaining years of the strategy, it is planned to have at least four meetings per year.

Aquaculture Licences

1694. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the implementation of the recommendations set out in the report of the independent aquaculture licensing review group which examines the process of licensing for aquaculture. [28468/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I received

the Report of the independent Aquaculture Licensing Review Group on 31st May 2017. This Group was tasked with making recommendations to improve the existing licensing system and to undertake steps to review the legislative framework having regard to Government policy for the sustainable development of aquaculture, as outlined in Food Wise 2025 and the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development.

The Review Group carried out a detailed examination of the existing aquaculture licensing process, undertook comprehensive stakeholder consultation and looked at comparative national and international consent systems to determine best practice for managing a complex licensing process in a transparent, environmentally appropriate and legally robust manner.

The Group's Report is published and available to view on Fishingnet.ie, the Government's Commercial Sea Fishing Network Portal. The overarching conclusion of the Report is for a root-and-branch reform of the aquaculture licence application processes to take place with a focus on both short-term immediate actions as well as longer term initiatives. There are a total of 30 recommendations in the Report.

My Department is currently considering the Report's recommendations. This work is regarded as high priority and implementation of recommendations of the Report will commence as soon as possible.

GLAS Payments

1695. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will investigate the situation in which GLAS payments are not being processed or payments made due to the functionality required to process a payment that differs from the previous years payment is not in place on the information technology system that processes the payments for GLAS and his Department cannot give a timeframe as to when this situation will be resolved in order that payments that are now outstanding for some months can be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28482/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the context of the Rural Development Programme 2015 - 2020 the Department has delivered over twenty new schemes that were supported by IT capability in the last two years. In the first two years of the current RDP programme my Department has already implemented substantially more RDP schemes than were implemented over the entire ten year lifetime of the previous RDP programme. To date Ireland has drawn down funding at a rate that is 2.4 times higher than the EU average. This rate of delivery and draw-down would not have been possible without the availability of high quality complex IT software systems to support the business units in operating these schemes. Since 2014 my Department has adopted a policy of implementing fully digital end-to-end support for all but the smallest of schemes.

My Department has an excellent record in the delivery of high quality ICT systems. In that respect my Department is ahead of the rest of our European partners and is also highly regarded across the Civil and Public Service. We have been consistently among the first to make payments in the EU.

A number of issues arose in particular in relation to the GLAS system with additional functionality being required to deal with non standard cases. Significant progress has been made in relation to payments in recent months with over 93% of GLAS I and II applicants now paid with documentation awaited from a further 1,200 applicants. Another 1,400 applications are under review.

All but a very small amount of outstanding work in relation to the GLAS scheme has been addressed and plans are in place to address this over the coming period. Updates of the software required to process applications for the various schemes are applied on an ongoing basis.

GLAS Payments

1696. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will investigate a GLAS payment to a person (details supplied) that is held up due to the information technology system not having the functionality required to process the payment that is overdue due to the fact there is a linear reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28483/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The person named has requested that the length of traditional stone wall included for maintenance in her application be reduced and this has resulted in the delay in issuing payment. My Department is actively working to resolve the issue with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

1697. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the maximum payment that can be granted to any one person for the greening payment under pillar 1 here in one scheme year; the total greening payment values in 2016 according to amounts (details supplied); and the number of herdowners paid, in tabular form. [28503/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The value of the Greening payment per eligible farmer is calculated as a fixed percentage of the total value of entitlements activated by that farmer. Currently the fixed percentage stands at approximately 44%. This fixed percentage is calculated annually by dividing the Greening ceiling for that year by the total value of all payment entitlements activated in that year and as such the fixed percentage may vary from year to year as the number of activated entitlements changes depending on applications in a particular year.

The following table sets out the number of farmers and greening payments in the range provided by the Deputy.

Range	No of Applicants	Payments
01-Between 0 and 5000	104429	187989795.3
02-Between 5000 and 10000	14718	100319143.9
03-Between 10000 and 20000	4077	53669896.48
04-Between 20000 and 30000	579	13816419.35
05-Between 30000 and 40000	135	4586473.41
06-Between 40000 and 50000	47	2057926.88

Range	No of Applicants	Payments
07-Between 50000 and 60000	20	1103103.45
08-Between 60000 and 70000	8	511821.33
09-Between 70000 and 80000	2	143751.2
10-Between 80000 and 90000	1	86924.47
11-Between 90000 and 100000	0	
12-Between 100000 and 110000	0	
13-Between 110000 and 120000	0	
14-Between 120000 and 130000	0	
15-Between 130000 and 140000	0	
16-Between 140000 and 150000	0	
17->150000	0	

Data Protection

1698. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if concerns have been raised to his Department or by the Data Protection Commissioner regarding issues concerning confidential details of persons and livestock information that is displayed at marts and shared with processors. [28504/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I wish to inform the Deputy that, to date, no such issue has been raised with my Department and to reassure him that all data protection matters are dealt with by my Department in line with current Data Protection legislation.

My Department is keenly aware of all its obligations in the area of data protection as regards the confidentiality of personal data for all its staff and customers. In the event of any personal data security breach involving my Department, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner is notified as a matter of policy and all such instances are dealt with in accordance with best practice guidance as issued by the Commissioner.

Farmers Charter

1699. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has examined putting the farmers' charter of rights on a statutory footing with respect to CAP and RDP payments being delivered by agreed timelines; if this is possible under current EU regulations; and the articles in CAP regulations that legislate for payment timelines. [28505/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Farmers Charter of Rights is effectively an agreement between the farm representative organisations and my Department. It sets down agreed target timelines for delivery of payments as well as standards for services, in respect of the schemes operated and services provided by my Department. It also brings clarity to the arrangements around inspections obligations as provided for in the legislation governing the various schemes.

A Farmers' Charter of Rights Monitoring Committee has been established under an independent chair to monitor these agreed targets and standards. This Committee is comprised of representatives of the main farm organisations and staff of my Department. The Monitoring Committee has met on six occasions since its establishment under the current Charter.

The operation of a number of schemes covered by this Charter is governed by EU/National legislation while others are governed by national law only. The highly ambitious targets that my Department strives to achieve under the Charter - targets which compare very favourably with the payment timeframes of our EU counterparts - cannot legally supersede national or EU law. The Charter therefore cannot grant rights which would affect or change the operation of those laws in so far as they apply to the Schemes and services in question. Accordingly, it is not possible to put the Farmers' Charter of Rights on a statutory footing.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

1700. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the drawdown on European funding arising approved projects included in Ireland's project list submitted to the EIB Commission member state special task force on developing an investment project pipeline in the EU that his Department contributed to. [28507/17]

1701. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department put forward no projects to the Department of Finance task force report for the European Fund for Strategic Investment in each year since it was established; and if no EFSI funding has been drawn down. [28508/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1700 and 1701 together.

In 2014, my Department contributed to a list of possible projects for the "EIB-Commission-Member State Special Task Force on developing an investment project pipeline in the EU". This was an indicative exercise and did not result in consideration or approvals of any of the possibilities outlined at that time.

Subsequently the EU Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group launched the "European Fund for Strategic Investments" (EFSI) to help overcome the current investment gap in the EU by mobilising private financing for strategic investments.

In December 2016, the EIB Group opened an office in Dublin and the Minister for Finance established an "EIB-Ireland Financing Group", on which my Department is represented. Since then my Department has also had bilateral discussions with the EIB.

In January, I launched the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme. The €25 million in public funding provided by my Department funds an interest rate subsidy and the guarantee, which is further supported by SBCI and the EIB Group through COSME (the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs). This type of innovative risk sharing product is new to Ireland but common across Europe.

In February, the EIB confirmed a €90 million long-term loan to Coillte to finance the cost of planting, forest management and forest road construction and maintenance over the next four years.

My Department will continue to liaise with the EIB regarding suitable financing opportunities in the agrifood sector.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

1702. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cross-compliance rules under CAP regulations 1306/2013 and 1307/2014; the percentage of beneficiaries that must be checked via on-the-spot controls including rural development programme schemes; his views on a matter (details supplied). [28509/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU regulations governing the Direct Payment Schemes and Rural Development measures require my Department to carry out Cross Compliance inspections on 1% of beneficiaries to ensure compliance with the Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and the standards for Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) in the areas of the environment, climate change and good agricultural condition of land; public, animal and plant health and animal welfare.

Participants in the Agri-environmental schemes, e.g. GLAS, AEOS, are required to deliver certain actions to a standard higher than the general Cross Compliance requirements referred to above. These specific cross compliance requirements are termed as baseline requirements. The EU regulations governing the Agri-environmental schemes require that 5% of beneficiaries must be inspected annually, which includes inspection to ensure compliance with these baseline requirements where applicable to the actions taken.

My Department will implement any simplification measures introduced by the EU to lessen the burden on both farmers and administrations, while continuing to maintain the overall aim of the various schemes.

Greyhound Industry

1703. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the process regarding the sale of Harold's Cross greyhound stadium to the Department of Education and Skills; the site valuations received; the discussions he has had with the Irish Greyhound Board, breeders, owners and other stakeholders during this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28510/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Chairman of Bord na gCon wrote to my Department on 10 May seeking my approval and that of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the sale of Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium to the Department of Education and Skills .

The sale of Harold's Cross Greyhound Racing Stadium is a transaction between the Department of Education and Skills and Bord na gCon. I had no role in the approval of the sum of €23 million offered for the stadium. Indeed I understand that the sum was based on an independent valuation by the Valuation office and that this was provided and accepted by the transacting parties, in accordance with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform procedures governing the sale of state assets.

I was however required to consent to the sale of the asset by Bord na gCon in accordance with the code of governance for State Bodies. The necessary Ministerial consents for the sale have been provided, subject to the proceeds being used to substantially reduce the debt and to the submission of a comprehensive business plan by Bord na gCon.

This sale was consistent with a recommendation in the Indecon Report, commissioned by my predecessor, that Bord na gCon consider disposing of assets, including Harold's Cross Greyhound Racing Stadium, in order to reduce its debt levels. This debt stood at €21.4 million at 31st December 2016, and the cost of servicing it was a significant impediment to the Bord's ability to carry out its statutory obligation to develop the industry.

I am confident that this sale, along with the new framework for improved governance and regulation currently undergoing pre legislative scrutiny in the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine, can provide a platform for a new beginning for the sector and a more sustainable future.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

1704. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will expedite a payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28622/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (DAS) was received from the person named on 10 April 2014.

Under the Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per hectare for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units per hectare calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year.

Processing of the 2014 DAS application of the person named identified irregularities in the sheep movement records which my officials were unable to reconcile. An official from my Department was in direct contact with representatives of the person named on 9 February 2015 and informed them of this finding and of the need to forward an updated flock book and the file would be reviewed. To date this information has not been received.

GLAS Payments

1705. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28624/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1st January 2016.

The person named has requested that the length of new hedgerow to be planted included in his application be reduced and this has resulted in the delay in issuing payment. My Department is actively working to resolve the issue with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

Departmental Records

1706. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if historians and genealogists can have access to records held by his Department in a warehouse in Portlaoise regarding the Land Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28640/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no immediate plans to make the 8 million or so records of the former Irish Land Commission (ILC) generally available to the public for research purposes or otherwise as they are still working documents and have not been handed over to the National Archives. My officials regularly access these records to service queries from the public relating to current and past transactions and for the full completion of the work of the former ILC. Wider access will be a matter for consideration when the completion of the work of the former ILC is at a more advanced stage. The records which are available in paper format only are fragile, some dating back as far as the late 1800's and are an irreplaceable resource should they get damaged. So in order to maintain them it is essential that they are handled and stored appropriately. Opening up access to these files cannot be considered until appropriate measures are undertaken to minimise potential damage from routine handling. While limited access is granted to persons on application, the office does not provide a research facility as the provision of such a service would require much greater resources than those currently available.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

1707. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28662/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department as outlined below. In relation to 2015 all of the Bodies furnished a report to my Department confirming tax compliance. As regards 2016, four of the Bodies have furnished a report confirming tax compliance. These are Coillte, Irish National Stud, National Milk Agency and the Veterinary Council of Ireland. I am awaiting receipt of reports confirming tax compliance from the remaining eight State Bodies which will be forwarded to my Department in the normal manner following completion of the audit of their 2016 financial statements by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

State Bodies under the aegis of my Department

- Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board
- Bord Bia
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- Bord na gCon
- Coillte
- Horse Racing Ireland

- Irish National Stud
- Marine Institute
- National Milk Agency
- Sea Fisheries Protection Authority
- Teagasc
- Veterinary Council of Ireland.

GLAS Payments

1708. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a 2016 GLAS advance payment will issue to persons (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28720/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of the 1 October 2015 and has received full payments in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process issues were identified with the Commonage action. Department officials are actively working to resolve these issues with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

GLAS Payments

1709. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in view of the fact the delay is causing undue financial hardship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28721/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of the 1 October 2015 and has received full payments in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases in relation to the Protection of Watercourse from Bovines actions. My Department has reviewed the issue and the 2016 payment will be further processed with a view to issuing payment at the earliest opportunity.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

1710. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive their organic farm payment for 2016 which was due in December 2016; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28827/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The outstanding Organic Farming Scheme payments relate to cases where issues have been identified and follow up with the applicant is required. These issues are being dealt with on a case by case

basis. The person named is one of the aforementioned cases. Once the outstanding issues have been resolved, payment will issue.

Aquaculture Development

1711. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 238 of 25 May 2017, his views on whether the criticism levelled against his Department in the recent EU audit of controls on organic foods can be applied also to so called organic farm salmon. [28828/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The audit undertaken last year by the EU of the controls applied by Ireland in the organic sector was extremely detailed and included a review of controls in the aquaculture sector. Overall, the audit team concluded that Ireland had a control system in place which laid down a clear division of tasks between the competent authority and the various control bodies, but that improvements were required in a number of areas. Many of these had already been identified by my own Department as part of its ongoing assessments and evaluations, and work was already underway to address them. In relation to aquaculture, the EU audit team had a number of specific recommendations to make, which were welcomed as constructive by my Department and which are being implemented.

Aquaculture Development

1712. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to parliamentary question number 239 of 25 May 2017, if the payment of the certification fee directly to the organic control body by the operator means that the certification exercise cannot be considered independent and should be carried out by a State agency such as the Marine Institute. [28829/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In accordance with the governing EU Regulation, the Department, as the Competent Authority, has opted to delegate certification of organic operators to four Organic Control Bodies. This approach is in common with many other EU member states. The registration fee applying is entirely a matter between that organisation and its members.

The Organic Control Bodies concerned are subject to supervision and ongoing monitoring by the Department. Furthermore all Organic Control Bodies must be accredited on an annual basis by the relevant accreditation body. All of these controls are designed to ensure the independence of the certification process, which is also verified by EU audit, and I am satisfied that this independence is in no way compromised by payment of the relevant fee.

Aquaculture Licences

1713. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 240 of 25 May 2017, his plans to commission an independent review of his Department's organic certification system for farmed salmon; and his further plans to withdraw organic certification from salmon farms pending the outcome of that review. [28830/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The certifica-

tion system for organic salmon in Ireland is subject to ongoing review and assessment by my Department and was also included in last year's comprehensive audit by the EU of the controls applied by Ireland in the organic sector generally. The EU team had a number of specific recommendations to make in relation to aquaculture, including the inspection of organic salmon farms, which my Department recognises as constructive and which are being implemented. I have no plan for a further independent review of the nature suggested by the Deputy. However, as indicated in previous replies to similar questions from the Deputy, my Department is reviewing compliance by a specific operator with the existing suite of organic requirements. Investigations and reviews of this nature are an important part of my Department's controls in this area.

Aquaculture Licences

1714. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to parliamentary question number 241 of 25 May 2017, if his department's fisheries and marine division controls all elements of aquaculture licensing from initial application to appeals against ministerial decisions; and his views on whether this serves to thwart the intentions of the Houses of the Oireachtas which established the regulatory agencies such as the Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority as independent bodies, in view of the fact that it undermines public confidence in the integrity of the licensing system, that the payment of grants to operators licensed under such a compromised system may be in breach of legislation and that the continued operation of this system by his department amounts to maladministration. [28831/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The issues referred to by the Deputy are managed by my Department strictly in accordance with applicable legislation.

All applications for aquaculture licences are considered by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and related legislation.

There is always a strict separation between my Ministerial role as decision maker in respect of aquaculture licence applications and my Ministerial duty to promote the sustainable development of the industry. This separation of duties is strictly observed.

The Sea Food Policy Management Division of my Department is responsible for corporate governance oversight of the independent Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board (ALAB). The Board was established under Section 22 of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 1997. The function of the Board is to provide an independent authority for the determination of appeals against Ministerial decisions in respect of aquaculture licences.

The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) was established by the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006 which provides that the Authority is independent in the exercise of its functions. Specifically, Section 46 of the Act provides that the Minister may give such general policy directions in writing to the Authority in relation to its functions as is considered appropriate but that the Minister may not exercise any power or control in relation to individual cases, or groups of cases, with which the Authority is concerned, or in relation to the performance in particular circumstances by the Authority of its functions.

The Marine Institute (MI) was established under the Marine Institute Act 1991. As the State agency responsible for marine research, technology development and innovation in Ireland, it provides scientific and technical advice to Government to help inform policy and to support the

sustainable development of Ireland's marine resource.

Under the Sustainable Aquaculture Scheme implemented as part of the European Maritime and fisheries Fund Operational Programme 2014-20, supports for capital investment in aquaculture are confined strictly to aquaculture enterprises that are fully compliant with the terms and conditions of their aquaculture and foreshore licences. Supports for capital investment in aquaculture sites located in Natura 2000 areas are available only to sites that are fully licensed in compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

1715. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the final year of an AEOS 2 contract will be paid to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28842/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The final year of the AEOS 2 contract of the person named was due to end at the end of 2016. However, the herdowner applied for GLAS and was accepted into that scheme with a contract commencement date of 1st January 2016 which was to run to the end of 2020, replacing the AEOS contract.

The GLAS approval letter which issued on the 29th January 2016 stated that applications could be withdrawn by contacting the section in writing by 31st March 2016. A withdrawal letter dated 7th April 2016 was received on 11th April 2016.

As the person named had joined GLAS the final year of the AEOS contract was set aside.

I have asked my officials to review the file and they will be in contact with the person named directly when this review is complete.

Turbary Rights

1716. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to review turbary rights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28864/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In cases where the Minister is the owner of lands subject to turbary rights I have no plans to review those rights. In all other cases it is a private matter between the parties concerned.

Fish Exports

1717. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the WTO tariffs that would apply for fish exports to the UK for each stock in relation to which such data is available in the absence of a trade agreement being formalised between the UK and EU within the two year period after Article 50 is triggered and if Britain decides to leave the single market and customs union at that point, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28929/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Government is fully committed to seeking a negotiated settlement between the EU and UK on Brexit, which will provide for continued unfettered access to the UK market, without tariffs and with

minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

However in the event that the EU and UK fail to negotiate a mutually acceptable trade agreement, both jurisdictions will have to apply the WTO 'Most Favoured Nations' tariff rates in relation to their imports.

In such a scenario the task of estimating tariff rates for specific products is complex, given that for tariffs for most fish products the ad valorem (value), product mix and the year of application are all relevant issues in determining the final tariff rate.

The specific rates for products are set out in the WTO database for the relevant countries, available at (<http://tdf.wto.org/default.aspx>)

My Department is currently carrying out an 'in depth' examination of the tariffs and duties for all of the main agri food exports to the UK, including fishery products, in order to establish the total duty applicable as a percentage of the 2016 declared value.

GLAS Appeals

1718. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28958/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application for GLAS 3.

During the GLAS pre approval checks for the Low Input Permanent Pasture action no record of a grazing enterprise was found on the holding on the Department databases under the herd number the GLAS application was submitted.

The person named has submitted additional documentation showing ownership of ovines under a second herd number. Department officials have reviewed the case on the basis of this additional information and the application will now be further processed for GLAS 3 approval.

Departmental Staff Relocation

1719. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff under the remit of his Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29031/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Due to the diverse range of staff employed by my Department, a number of different transfer arrangements/agreements are in place for these various grade streams. Given the variety of these arrangements there is no single list of staff requesting transfer to any location.

My Department supports staff mobility and seeks to accommodate requests from staff to transfer to specific locations where possible, taking account of the business needs of my Department. The transfer arrangement/agreements that are in place ensure a structured approach to the redeployment of staff to locations where they are needed. No additional expenditure is

incurred by my Department when staff apply for and are transferred to locations outside Dublin.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

1720. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason an inaccurate press statement issued by Inland Fisheries Ireland with the headline, New Study reveals Pike are Native to Ireland, has not been corrected to reflect the actual report's findings despite requests from organisations (details supplied); the reason Inland Fisheries Ireland has failed to remove this inaccurate press statement from its website; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28727/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am advised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the information provided in the press release issued by the Agency on 15 October 2015 is entirely consistent with the information provided in the peer reviewed scientific publication entitled "Genetic structure of pike (*Esox Lucius*)" jointly authored by 5 scientists and published in the Journal of Biogeography. The paper reveals a complex and previously unrecognised colonisation history of Ireland.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

1721. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the sale of a property that was previously occupied by the Central Fisheries Board (details supplied); if conditions were attached to the sale of this site in view of its architectural and historical significance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28815/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Matters in relation to premises are a day to day operational matter for the Board of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) subject to Public Financial Procedures. However, I am informed by IFI that the site referred to in the Question was sold, following advertisement, in a public tender process in March 2013.

IFI is not aware of any condition attached to the sale of this site. However, under section 55(1)(a) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, Balnagowan House, which is on the site, has been added to the record of Protected Structures.

The sale was part of the overall and on-going rationalisation of the fisheries service which included, inter alia, the purchase and fit out of a new headquarters for IFI in Citywest to facilitate exit from relatively expensive temporary rented accommodation.

North-South Interconnector

1722. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will redraft the terms of reference for the North-South Interconnector to reflect the wishes of the persons in the areas of counties Cavan and Monaghan affected and two groups (details supplied) as per the Fianna Fáil Dáil Éireann motion which was passed in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27426/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 19 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South

Interconnector project in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May last year. The planning decision is currently the subject of Judicial Review proceedings. The planning process for the section of the project in Northern Ireland is ongoing with an oral hearing concluding on 27 February 2017. In light of the motions passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, I have had proposals prepared for an updated independent study. In preparing the terms of reference for this study, my officials held meetings with representatives of the North East Pylon Pressure Campaign on 28 March and the Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee on 3 April. This engagement was important in facilitating local representative groups input into the terms of reference drafting process.

I approved the Terms of Reference for the study and published them on my Department's website on Monday 8 May. This study will bring further clarity to the relative cost and technical merits of overhead and underground solutions for the North South Interconnector.

Following the publication of the Terms of Reference, I met with the Deputy and a number of other Oireachtas members from Cavan, Monaghan and Meath on Tuesday 16 May. This meeting provided me the opportunity to update the members on progress in relation to the proposed study and for the members to provide feedback.

As discussed at that meeting, it is not proposed to include external factors (such as local tourism, health, landscape, agriculture and heritage). These were examined as part of the statutory planning process which is the appropriate method by which such impacts are assessed and evaluated and therefore there are no plans to re-draft the terms of reference.

The impact on land and property values and the level of compensation paid in lieu of such impacts was also discussed at the meeting with Oireachtas members and at the meetings with the community groups referred to in the question. Whilst it would not be appropriate for me to intrude on settled processes for addressing these issues between developers and affected landowners, in light of the concerns that have been voiced, I am commissioning research on international comparative practice on the approach to and levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage power lines.

Sporting Rights

1723. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the processes involved in the tendering for the broadcast of GAA matches on public and private broadcast networks; the frequency with which this process must take place; the efforts in place to allow for the national broadcaster to have fair access to GAA matches in view of its public service responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28259/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The sale of the broadcasting rights of sporting events, including the right to broadcast GAA matches, is a matter for the rights holder concerned and any broadcaster that may have an interest in purchasing these rights. As Minister, I have no role in this process. Section 114 (1) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 states the principal objects and associated powers of RTÉ and Section 118 of the Act states the equivalent objects and associated powers of TG4. Section 98 provides that both shall be independent in the pursuance of these objects, subject to the requirements of the Act.

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive provides that Member States may designate sporting and cultural events of major importance to society as free-to-air. At a national level,

the Broadcasting Act 2009 sets out the statutory process for designating events as free-to-air in this jurisdiction.

Under the 2009 Act, I, as Minister, am obliged to review the list of designated events every three years. The purpose of the review is to consider the appropriateness of the current list of designated events and to examine whether to add any events of major importance to society.

Currently, the All Ireland Senior Inter-County Football and Hurling Finals are designated as events of major importance to society and are made available for broadcasting on a free to air basis.

I have recently received approval from the European Commission to designate the All Ireland Senior Ladies Football and Camogie Finals as events of major importance. This process will be completed shortly and will ensure that these events will be available on a free to air basis.

Energy Schemes

1724. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the success or otherwise of the warmth and well-being pilot programme that commenced in 2016 and piloted in parts of Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24; the number of persons who have benefitted from this programme in each area, in tabular form; his plans for the expansion of this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28729/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Warmth and Well-being scheme is a pilot initiative being delivered under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The main aim of the scheme is to demonstrate the positive effects that making homes warmer and more energy efficient can have on the health and well-being of people in energy poverty who are living with a chronic respiratory condition. An independent research project will assess the impact the scheme is having. At the conclusion of the scheme and with independent evidence on its effectiveness, the potential for a wider rollout will be considered. In total, 202 homes have been upgraded so far under the scheme, the majority of these in Dublin 24. However, the wider eligibility criteria were only announced at the end of last year so by the end of this year I expect a more balanced pattern of homes completed. There is a currently a waiting list of over 400 eligible applicants across the five areas and the rate of homes completed under the scheme will substantially increase from July onwards when SEAI increases the number of contractors available to deliver deep retrofits.

I expect to allocate at least €20m in funding to this pilot to provide for the upgrade of at least 1,500 homes. This is the minimum size necessary to develop the evidence base that will be necessary to reach conclusions on the potential for a wider rollout of the scheme.

The Deputy may also be aware that the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme is available on a nationwide basis to low income households who are at risk of energy poverty. More information on this scheme is available on SEAI's website at: http://www.seai.ie/Grants/Warmer_Homes_Scheme/About_the_BEWH.html or Freephone: 1800 250 204.

Health and Safety Inspections

1725. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Ac-

tion and Environment his views on the recent leak of emissions at a location (details supplied); if he will report on the findings of the EPA regarding the incident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28999/17]

1726. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions being taken in the wake of the recent incident at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29023/17]

1727. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a health and safety report is being carried out in the wake of the recent incident at a location (details supplied); when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29024/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1725 to 1727, inclusive, together.

Industrial Emissions installations are subject to a range of regulatory controls under national legislation, including the conditions attached to a licence issued by the Environmental Protection Agency on the operation and management of such sites. As Minister, I have no function in monitoring or enforcing the conditions attached to such licences and I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the EPA, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function conferred on the Agency under the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992 as amended.

Health and safety in the workplace is not an issue under my remit as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Therefore, I have no role in relation to the operation of the facility in question, nor the investigation of such incidents. These are matters for the appropriate statutory agencies and I understand that the EPA and the Health and Safety Authority are both investigating the matter.

Energy Schemes

1728. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will publish the research and consultation on minimum energy efficiency standards in the rented sector as outlined in the Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty 2016-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29105/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As outlined in the Government’s Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty, minimum standards for energy efficiency in the rented sector are being considered because published research has demonstrated that people living in rented accommodation are more than twice as likely to live in a home with an E, F or G Building Energy Rating (BER) than homeowners. Households living in relatively energy inefficient properties spend €160-€419 per annum more on energy than households in a home rated with a BER of B. This leaves those living in rented accommodation more vulnerable to energy poverty.

This situation arises as the typical tenancy in Ireland is short and hence tenants do not tend to invest significant sums in the property they are living in. At the same time, landlords underinvest in energy efficiency works as the tenants are the ones who benefit from the consequent energy bill savings and in a constrained rental market there appears to be little value placed on the energy efficiency of a rented property. These diverging incentives mean that energy efficiency investment is much lower in the private rented sector than among homeowners, even though

Government grant schemes such as the Better Energy Homes scheme are open to landlords.

My Department has worked with external consultants to examine the impact of introducing minimum energy efficiency standards to counteract this market failure but this must be balanced against the impact such regulations would have on the price and availability of rented properties.

With the publication of the 2017 Census, my Department is working to update the research findings and incorporate this new data. By the autumn I intend to present the findings of this updated research to a seminar of tenant and landlord interest groups, with a view to publishing the research shortly thereafter and engaging in a full public consultation.

Departmental Staff Data

1729. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form. [29249/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department currently employs 334 full-time equivalent staff. The Department has offices located in the following counties and locations:

- Dublin - Adelaide Road, Customs House and Beggars Bush
- Cavan - Cavan Town
- Wexford - Wexford Town

The breakdown of staff numbers by county is as follows:

County	Dublin	Cavan	Wexford
No. of Staff	259	39	35

(Note: One staff member is employed in Brussels)

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. The Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisations.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

1730. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the provision of broadband to Loughill, County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26538/17]

1737. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26770/17]

1740. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a townland (details supplied) will be offered broadband under the latest announcement of the rollout to broadband in rural Ireland; the criteria in establishing the areas which will receive broadband under the initiative; the timeframe for the implementation of the

plan; if north County Offaly will be considered a priority under the plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26873/17]

1743. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to the rollout of the national broadband plan, the timeline for the provision of universal coverage along the L2190 between Inch, Coolgreaney and Arklow of high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26938/17]

1745. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26991/17]

1756. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding fibre broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27166/17]

1757. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a reply will issue to a query raised in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27207/17]

1766. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding fibre broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27404/17]

1775. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend broadband cover to a location (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27748/17]

1778. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will extend the area for the initial rollout of fibre broadband in the Gaybrook area L1132, Mullingar, County Westmeath. [27808/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1730, 1737, 1740, 1743, 1745, 1756, 1757, 1766, 1775 and 1778 together.

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.

In April, eir signed an agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas. 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.

Quarterly updates will be published on the Departments website. The Q1 2017 update will be published shortly and I am pleased to announce that the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement

The decision by eir to invest in infrastructure to deploy high speed broadband services to an additional 300,000 premises in rural Ireland was taken purely on commercial grounds. Neither I nor the Department have a statutory authority to direct eir in this regard.

I also published in April an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The Map shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

There are approximately 2.3m premises covering Ireland's 26 counties, of which approximately 542,000 (23%) premises are located in the AMBER area on the Map. These premises will require State intervention and are the focus for the State Intervention procurement process. The remaining 1.8m premises are located in the BLUE areas and will be/are served by commercial operators. Of the 1.8m premises, 300,000 premises fall within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018 (Light BLUE on map). Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

The table below details the percentage of premises to be covered by the State Intervention and through commercial investment in the areas identified by the Deputies.

County Name	Location	Townland	AMBER% Premises within the NBP Inter- vention Area	BLUE% Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE% Premises planned commercial rural deployment
Cork	Ballygarvan	Ballygarvan	27%	65%	8%
Kerry	*Kilbrean Beg	Kilbrean Beg (Ed Killarney)	52%		48%
		Knockawaddra West	5%	95%	
		Knockawaddra East		100%	
	Knockawaddra	Knockawaddra Middle		100%	
	Manister	Monaster North	20%		80%
	Crecora	Ballyveelish	13%		87%
	Barley Mount West	Barleymount West	62%		38%
Limerick	Loughill	Loughill (Ed Kilscannel)	100%		
	Clonkirk	Clonkirk	56%	4%	40%

Questions - Written Answers

County Name	Location	Townland	AMBER% Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	BLUE% Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE% Premises planned commercial rural deployment
Monaghan	Ballybay	Cornamucklaglass	8%	92%	
	Rhode	Laurencetown	7%	93%	
Offaly	Carrick	Carrick (Garrycastle By)	100%		
	Gaybrook	Gorteen (Fartullagh By)	23%		77%
		Gaybrook Demesne	85%		15%
Westmeath	Knockville	Knockville	100%		
	Inch	Bolabradra	10%		90%
Wexford	Coolgreaney	Coolgreaney	3%	4%	94%
Wicklow	Arklow	Arklow		100%	

*The eircode referred to by the Deputy in the townland of Kilbrean Beg falls within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

A formal procurement process is in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. The finalisation of the State Intervention Area for the procurement process is an important milestone as it means that bidders can progress their business plans and the Department can move to the next stage of the procurement. The three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The State Intervention network will be a wholesale network and retail service providers will be able to use the network to provide enhanced broadband services to their customers.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP, once contracts are in place.

The Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded.

In this regard, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force in July 2016 together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers

prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available at the following link:<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>. In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, I signed regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band. On 22 May, ComReg announced the result of its 3.6 GHz spectrum award which will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. In my Department's Estimates for 2017, I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances. These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

Waste Disposal Charges

1731. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the developments that are due to take place in the domestic waste collection market in Dublin in the coming months among private waste collectors; the way in which he plans to protect households from significant increases in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26546/17]

1739. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce a pay-by-weight system for waste collection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26814/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1731 and 1739 together.

The charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

My Department is reviewing, together with the regulatory authorities and industry representatives, the introduction of an incentivised system which encourages people to prevent, reduce and segregate their waste. This approach is in line with Government waste policy to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill for disposal and will also facilitate the provision of a range of options for people to manage their waste costs.

I have already indicated quite clearly that any such system will encompass more than just the previously proposed pay-by-weight per-kilogramme model. It is important to acknowledge that many people are already on plans that encourage waste prevention and segregation, including some which contain an element of weight-based charging.

As previously pointed out, I do not have a role in setting the level of charges for waste col-

lection. I would, however, like to see a system in operation whereby the prevention and segregation of household waste is encouraged so that we reduce our reliance on landfills around the country, and enable people to manage their waste costs by preventing waste where possible and segregating the remaining waste properly to improve the rate and quality of recycling.

Fishing Licences

1732. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 725 of 28 February 2017, the status of the application. [26570/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am informed by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) that the club referred to made a submission to IFI on the availability of a long term licence for Pallas Lake. Longer term licences are granted on the basis of an appropriate development plan and a formal application. I understand that the application was made on foot of funding opportunities available to the club to develop the lake further as an amenity and to proactively promote the lake.

In order to facilitate a licence arrangement, the status of the title to the fishery must be verified. Issues of title verification can be complex but it is important, particularly from the club's perspective, to establish this definitively.

IFI have confirmed that Pallas Lake is one of 17 catchments that are leased from ESB and under the current conditions of the lease IFI are prohibited from sub-letting the lake.

IFI advise that they intend to meet with ESB to discuss the current lease and once finalised further consideration can be given to the Club's request.

Electromagnetic Fields Studies

1733. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the recommendations of the two Oireachtas committee reports carried out on the health impacts of microwave radiation in the past; if his Department is monitoring the health and safety regulations on microwave radiation of other EU jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26654/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Both the Joint Committees on Public Enterprise and Transport, and on Communications, Marine and Natural Resources published reports on exposure to non-ionising radiation from mobile phone hand sets and telecommunication masts. Both reports included recommendations ranging from the monitoring of exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMF) to planning guidelines for telecommunication masts and mobile phone base stations.

To consider the issues raised by the committees, an Inter-Departmental Committee on Health Effects of Electromagnetic Fields was appointed by the Government in 2005. Consultations were held and as a result the Report of the Expert Group on the Health Effects of Electromagnetic Fields was published in March, 2007. The report informed the Department's policy on EMF and non-Ionising radiation, focusing primarily on the issue of public exposure and addressing recommendations made in earlier reports.

More recently, my Department commissioned the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment in the Netherlands (RIVM) to produce a report titled "Electromagnetic Fields

in the Irish Context”, which was published in October, 2016. This report examined the most up to date peer-reviewed research on the possible health effects of exposure to electromagnetic fields and also examined how a sample of 5 other countries deal with the policy issue, including how these policies are implemented in practice. The report confirmed earlier conclusions that no adverse short- or long-term effects have been shown to occur from exposure to electromagnetic fields at levels below the limits recommended by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP).

The recommendations from the report also reaffirmed Ireland’s approach on the issue on electromagnetic fields, which follows best practice in adopting internationally recognised standards and guidelines for public exposure to electromagnetic radiation developed by the ICNIRP. The ICNIRP guidelines ensure adequate protection measures for the public from any EMF sources, limiting exposure from mobile phones and masts in addition to power line fields. For example, recommending that where possible new power lines should be sited away from heavily populated areas so as to minimise exposure. This precautionary policy is in line with the conclusions of EU *Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR)* in its 2015 Opinion.

To promote on-going public confidence in measures to mitigate any potential health effects of non-ionising radiation, officials in my Department are developing proposals to better advise local and central Government, and other public bodies, on all appropriate non-ionising radiation issues, including advice on regulations and standards for the safe use of non-ionising radiation.

Post Office Network

1734. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a reciprocal free post arrangement is in place between Ireland and China which provides free post from China to Ireland and from Ireland to China. [26697/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Delivery of international mails between An Post and China Post is remunerated under the Terminal Dues rates element of the UPU Inter-Governmental Treaty, to which Ireland and China are parties. The Government has appointed An Post as the designated Universal Service Provider in Ireland. There is no reciprocal free post arrangement in place between Ireland and China which provides free post from China to Ireland and/or from Ireland to China.

Litter Pollution Fines

1735. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of fines for dog fouling handed out by each local authority in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the amount of expenditure spent by each local authority each year in tackling dog fouling; and the number of staff in each local authority that have responsibility for the issuing of fines and monitoring of dog fouling. [26726/17]

1765. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of fines issued to persons in the past three years under section 22 of the Litter Pollution Act 1997 regarding dog fouling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27389/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1735 and 1765 together.

Although in 2016, dog fouling constituted just 1.21 per cent of all litter nationally, it is an issue of personal concern to me given its potential impacts on human health, particularly for children.

It is an offence under section 22 of the Litter Pollution Acts, 1997 to 2009 not to clean up after your dog. I believe that there are sufficient penalties in place, when enforced, to deal with the issue of dog fouling under the Acts, but ultimately it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that they play their part in preserving the environment for others through the responsible disposal of their litter, including in relation to dog fouling.

Each local authority must determine the most appropriate course of action to tackle litter pollution locally, including the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean-up actions in relation to litter and dog fouling, taking account of its own particular circumstances and priorities. Authorised local authority officers and Gardaí may issue a notice or on-the-spot fine to an individual believed of committing a prescribed offence under the Acts. 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 local authority's functions. It is, therefore, a matter for each individual Chief Executive to assign staff to specific business function areas within their organisation .

Although the dog fouling data sought is not currently collated, data in relation to expenditure by each local authority on street/road cleaning, litter warden services, and litter public awareness initiatives, for the years 2010 to 2016, is available on the Department's website <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/environment/topics/waste/litter/Pages/Local-Authority-Litter-Fines-and-Expenditure-Statistics.aspx>. A breakdown, by local authority, of the total amount collected for litter on-the-spot fines and court fines is also available at this link.

As part of the targeted direct response to deal with litter, my Department operates an Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme (ALAGS). Under this scheme, local authorities can apply for funding for projects aimed at raising awareness of litter issues, including that of dog fouling. Local authorities are asked to focus their activities under the scheme on young people and in particular on schools and community groups with an emphasis on encouraging long term behavioural change. It is open to local authorities to utilise some of this funding to improve the situation specifically in relation to dog fouling.

Compared to 2016, I have increased funding for the ALAGS scheme in 2017 by 28% and allocated a total of €884,000 to local authorities this year. My Department recently issued a circular on the scheme and I have specifically requested local authorities to consider anti-dog fouling schemes in the awarding of grants.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

1736. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the Government's position regarding the EU Commission's proposals for a new renewable energy directive (details supplied). [26730/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 Renewable Energy Directive requires that biofuels must meet strict sustainability criteria to qualify for support and to be counted towards renewable energy targets. Under these criteria biofuels may not be made from raw materials originating from tropical forests or recently deforested areas, drained peatland, wetland or highly biodiverse areas. In

addition, the 2015 ILUC Directive limits to 7% the amount of energy from crop based biofuels, whose use could lead to indirect land use change (ILUC), that Member States can count towards their 2020 renewable energy targets for transport. The ILUC Directive will be transposed into Irish legislation by my Department by the deadline of 10 September 2017.

In November 2016, the European Commission published a proposal for a new Renewables Directive that envisages an overall European Union renewable energy target of at least 27% in 2030. It is proposed in the draft Directive that the amount of energy from crop based biofuels which can be counted towards renewable energy shares in transport (RES-T) in the period after 2020 will be progressively reduced from 7% in 2020 to 3.8% in 2030.

Biofuel production and its use, unless properly regulated, may not deliver required greenhouse gas savings and could impact negatively on food production and land use. It is important, therefore, that measures are in place to mitigate against environmental risks, such as Indirect Land-Use Change, of certain categories of biofuels. It is also important that the development of advanced biofuels, which pose little risk of ILUC, are encouraged. Both the ILUC Directive and the proposed new Renewables Directive contain measures to incentivise the production of these advanced biofuels.

As the wide ranging proposals of the new Renewables Directive are negotiated at EU level, my Department will continue to work closely with relevant Government Departments and other Member States on all issues, including the biofuels proposals, with a view to ensuring that Ireland's interests are protected.

Question No. 1737 answered with Question No. 1730.

Post Office Closures

1738. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of post offices that have closed in each of the years 2000 to 2016 by county, in tabular form. [26781/17]

1796. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has received communications from An Post in relation to the number of post offices that have closed in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 by county, in tabular form. [28998/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1738 and 1796 together.

Issues relating to the closure of post offices are an operational matter for the Board and management of An Post and not one in which I, as Minister, have any statutory function.

I will, however, request An Post to issue a reply directly to the Deputy with the information sought.

Question No. 1739 answered with Question No. 1731.

Question No. 1740 answered with Question No. 1730.

Brexit Negotiations

1741. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26899/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 2 May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department has a broad remit encompassing telecommunications, energy, climate, broadcasting and environment.

The ongoing work in my Department identifies potential impacts across each sector, defines specific priorities for the Brexit process and examines policy recommendations.

My Department has identified energy as the highest priority sector. Maintenance of secure energy trading between the UK and EU Member States is vital to sustain and maintain Ireland's economic growth. In addition, maintaining the Single Electricity Market across the island of Ireland is a key priority.

I wish to assure the Deputy that I and my Department are working hard across Government and with our EU colleagues to prepare for Brexit and minimise the potential impacts on Ireland.

Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan

1742. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenditure by his Department on research and development in the maritime energy sector including tidal, wave and wind energy in each of the past five years, in tabular form. [26934/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2014 Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA) sets out the Government's policy in the ocean energy area. The plan identifies the sustainable economic opportunity for Ireland in the period to 2030 of realising the potential of our indigenous offshore wind, wave and tidal energy resources. In contrast to offshore wind, wave and tidal energy is still at the R&D stage globally. Notwithstanding the development of promising experimental devices, much more research, development and trials are required to bring wave and tidal energy technology to commercial viability.

Exchequer support in terms of research, development and demonstration was increased under the OREDP. This funding supports Ireland's commitment to world class test facilities including the Lir National Ocean Test Facility in Cork, the quarter scale Galway Bay test site, and the full scale Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site (AMETS), off the coast of Mayo. This funding also supports the Prototype Development Fund, which is operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, and provides grant aid to support developers in bringing their devices from prototype to full scale commercial viability.

A breakdown of the funding drawn down by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland for ocean energy research and development in each of the years 2012 to 2016 is set out in the table.

Year	Total €million
2016	3.830
2015	3.977
2014	3.883
2013	1.624
2012	2.535

In addition, my Department provided grant aid of €3 million over the period 2012-2015 towards the rebuilding of the Beaufort Laboratory at the IMERC campus, which now houses the Lir Ocean Test facilities.

Question No. 1743 answered with Question No. 1730.

Public Sector Pensions Data

1744. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26968/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information sought in respect of their organisation.

Question No. 1745 answered with Question No. 1730.

Postal Codes

1746. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated costs for adapting information technology systems to include Eircode for departmental mail; the number of Departments that have adapted their information technology systems to implement Eircode; and the cost to the exchequer in this regard. [27007/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, was awarded a 10 year contract in December 2013 to develop, implement, maintain and promote the use of the

National Postcode System “Eircode”. The contract provided for a programme of public sector database encoding with Eircodes for 15 public sector bodies that have frequent interaction with the public. Prior to the Eircode launch approximately 80million public sector database records were encoded with Eircodes, costing €11.5m (VAT inclusive).

Public sector bodies have used their regular on-going ICT software upgrades to incorporate Eircodes as part of other changes to their systems. The cost of adapting systems to use Eircodes is a matter for individual organisations, though Departments have indicated that this has resulted in no significant cost to those bodies.

Eircodes are being used by the large public sector bodies, including: Department of Social Protection, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Revenue Commissioners and the Health Service Executive. Many other state bodies and agencies that have interaction with the public have also incorporated the Eircode into their systems. These include the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Local Government Management Agency; Central Statistics Office; Department of Education & Skills; Residential Tenancies Board; Companies Registration Office; Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland; Ordnance Survey Ireland; An Post; National Treasury Management Agency; Electric Ireland and ESB Networks.

Postal Codes

1747. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of new eircodes that were issued in 2016; the number issued in the first quarter of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27008/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, was awarded a 10 year contract in December 2013 to develop, implement, maintain and promote the use of the National Postcode System “Eircode”. Eircode have informed my Department that in 2016 the total number of addresses assigned an Eircode was 16,183 and the total number of addresses assigned an Eircode in the first quarter of 2017 was 5,152. New Eircodes can be found on the free to use online Eircode Finder (<https://www.eircode.ie/>), which remains very popular with the public with just under 10 million searches since the finder went live. The finder app provides both the geographical and postal addresses for properties in the State.

Inland Fisheries Ireland

1748. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason the policy document prepared in 2012 which involved the various angling associations (details supplied) and Inland Fisheries Ireland was not implemented despite the fact that the final draft of both policy documents received the support of national inland fisheries forum; the reason both documents were subsequently altered by Inland Fisheries Ireland to remove Lough Owel from the list of designated wild brown trout lakes without appropriate consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27057/17]

1749. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason Inland Fisheries Ireland is reviewing the policies pertaining to management of pike and designated wild brown trout fisheries in view of the fact that policies which were agreed in 2012 and 2013 were never implemented and given an opportunity to work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27058/17]

1750. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he will take to direct Inland Fisheries Ireland to implement the pike and trout policies which were subject to agreement by the relevant parties in 2012 and 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27059/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1748 to 1750, inclusive, together.

The National Pike policy, and similar policies for Bass and Trout, were launched, by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), in August 2014. The Pike Policy was agreed with the Irish Federation of Pike Angling Clubs, the Trout Anglers Federation of Ireland and the National Association of Recreational Anglers. It was expected that the policy would be reviewed following 3 years of its implementation.

IFI commenced, in late 2016, the process of examining all relevant and appropriate data to inform the review of these policies.

An important element of this examination is a review of the management of pike in designated wild brown trout fisheries. A group comprised of a range of representatives from all relevant disciplines within Inland Fisheries Ireland has been formed and is undertaking this review. Representatives of Pike and Trout Federations have been invited to participate in the group.

The work of the group is in an investigative and discovery phase and, in this regard, the input of a range of scientists identified by members of the group has also been sought. Submissions received by the Review Group, will be considered by the group prior to any conclusions or recommendations being made. Formal discussion on the policy will not take place until such time as IFI have also delivered the outputs from their scientific programme

A public consultation, commenced by the Board of Inland Fisheries Ireland in November 2016, closed in December and all submissions can now be viewed by the public on the IFI website: www.fisheriesireland.ie.

The Review Group aims to complete the process by the end of September 2017. However, this is predicated on having an opportunity to complete the associated scientific research programme and all of the work of the review group in the context of the volume of submissions, the technical nature of the data referenced and the complexity of the issue.

It is important that the policy review group is given sufficient time and space to complete the review and proposals for revision of policy as regards pike and trout, if any, will be decided once the review is completed. In the meantime, the existing policy, agreed in 2014, has been continued in 2017.

State Properties

1751. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the State will receive land rental from Bord na Móna for the development of solar farm projects on State-owned lands in view of the recent announcement by Bord Na Móna and the ESB; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27083/17]

1752. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the State will receive an increased dividend from Bord na Móna if it uses State-owned lands to develop solar farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27084/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1751 and 1752 together.

Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts 1946 to 1998. The development of its landbank, which is vested in the company, is an operational matter for the Board and management of the company. The State does not have any right to receive rental income in respect of same.

The approval of the annual dividend payable by Bord na Móna to the Exchequer is a matter for the Board of Bord na Móna. However, as shareholder, I determine dividend policy in consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and NewERA. Current dividend policy is based on a percentage of annual profits after tax.

Renewable Energy Projects

1753. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will ensure that the same financial rules and regulations apply to a State-owned company that decides to develop solar farms on State owned lands to ensure that private solar farm developers are not disadvantaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27085/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2016 Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy in Ireland. This builds on the 2015 Energy White Paper and recognises that solar has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby also enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future and It is increasingly recognised that Solar PV has the potential to contribute to meeting Ireland's renewable energy and climate change objectives My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. Analysis is on-going on a range of technologies to be included. This analysis includes an assessment of the cost of supporting Solar Photovoltaics - both rooftop and ground-mounted, at various scales.

A public consultation on the design elements of the new RESS will be published shortly, and subject to Government approval and EU State Aid clearance, it is expected the new scheme will be open for new applications in 2018.

Any solar farm developer applying to the new scheme for support, will do so on a commercial and competitive basis, and the same planning, grid connection and pre-qualifying criteria will apply to all projects equally.

Energy Usage

1754. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to reduce energy costs. [27091/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The overarching energy objective of successive Governments has been to ensure secure and sustainable supplies of competitively priced energy to all consumers. As outlined in the Energy White Paper, Government policy is to ensure that policy choices impacting energy costs are evidence-based with a focus on competitiveness, cost-benefit, security and sustain-

ability. The electricity and gas markets are commercial and deregulated operating within national and European regulatory regimes. I have no statutory function in the monitoring or setting of gas or electricity prices.

Responsibility for the regulation of the gas or electricity markets is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), which is an independent statutory body.

At a national level, the deregulated energy market results in choices for consumers and businesses in terms of suppliers, products and prices. I would encourage consumers to either switch supplier or to contact their current supplier to ensure that the best available deal is being provided. Two CER approved websites, www.bonkers.ie and www.switcher.ie, are very helpful in aiding consumers to choose the products that best suit their needs and assisting them to switch energy suppliers.

Under various relevant Statutory Instruments, CER carries out statutory market monitoring functions and has the responsibility to ensure the market operates competitively for the benefit of the consumer. It also conducts regulatory scrutiny of the network costs component of retail prices.

Energy efficiency supports also represent a significant opportunity for consumers and businesses to reduce their energy costs. The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) provides the policy framework for energy efficiency in Ireland. Energy efficiency supports are available via the SEAI, to assist both business and domestic energy consumers, with significant funding allocated to them.

In 2017 I have allocated increased funding to the Better Energy programme, which provides funds for energy efficiency upgrades to homes, as well as €8m for the expanded Warmth and Well-being pilot programme and a further €5m to a deep retrofit pilot programme. Overall, over €100m will be spent on supporting sustainable energy projects in 2017, saving over 116,000 tonnes in carbon emissions every year, reducing overall dependence on imported fossil fuels, and supporting around 3,000 jobs.

Disability Act Employment Targets

1755. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27133/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies: - to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities

- to comply with any statutory Code of Practice
- to meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities
- to report annually on the achievement of these obligations

My Department is committed to supporting and promoting the employment of people with

disabilities. In the National Disability Authority's (NDA) latest published report for 2015, the NDA noted that people employed in my Department with a disability totalled 3.3% of total staffing, exceeding the 3% target.

All advertised vacancies in my Department are open to people with disabilities in accordance with the Disability and Employment Equality Acts.

The information requested in relation to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. The Department will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisations.

Questions Nos. 1756 and 1757 answered with Question No. 1730.

Inland Fisheries Ireland Staff

1758. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of fisheries protection officers employed by Inland Fisheries Ireland in each of the years 2005 to 2016; the number of man hours spent on patrol to protect the fisheries resources in each of those years, in tabular form; the number of protection officers which have been transferred to alternative roles in the organisation between 2005 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27238/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer to the reply to Question No. 278 of 18 May, 2017.

Broadband Service Provision

1759. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to media reports outlining an agreement reached by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the EU Council of Ministers, if towns and large urban areas in County Louth are set to benefit from a European wide project to deliver free Wi-Fi access; and the towns and cities that have been identified for free Wi-Fi access. [27247/17]

1760. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding to be delivered by the EU further to media reports outlining an agreement reached by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the EU Council of Ministers to deliver a European wide project to deliver free Wi-Fi access; and the funding allocated to each of the local authorities. [27248/17]

1761. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the criteria that has been applied to identify towns and cities that will benefit further to media reports outlining an agreement reached by the European Parliament, the EU Commission and the EU Council of Ministers to deliver a European wide project to deliver free wifi access; the way in which this may impact on the national broadband plan. [27249/17]

1762. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to media reports outlining an agreement reached by the European Parliament, the EU Commission and the EU Council of Ministers to deliver a European wide project to deliver free wifi access, the date on which this agreement was reached; the timeframe for the associated funding to be allocated; and the timeframe for the project to deliver this wifi access. [27250/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1759 to 1762, inclusive.

The Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations (EU) No 1316/2013 and (EU) No 283/2014 as regards the promotion of Internet connectivity in local communities - COM(2016)589 was agreed at political level on 29 May 2017. Known as “WIFI4EU”, the proposal announced by the European Commission in September 2016, is designed to provide a limited number of public Wi-Fi hotspots in public spaces such as parks, squares, libraries, and some public buildings.

Importantly, it is proposed that hotspots will rest on existing backhaul provided by public entities defined as municipalities, grouping of municipalities, and other local public authorities and institutions, libraries and hospitals. While these hotspots will provide additional connectivity, they are not designed to fill in broadband coverage gaps, or replace mobile phone services. They will, however, offer additional flexibility for internet connectivity in certain public areas for citizens. By stimulating integration with existing public services, the initiative will assist in promoting public interest in high capacity internet services and will contribute to the take-up of broadband services and also to the development of public infrastructure and digital inclusion.

The total amount available for the project across all EU Member States will amount to €120 million under the EU’s Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) funding mechanism, which will be administered in a series of tranches over a period of three years. The total amount should result in approximately 6,000 – 8,000 local communities across the EU receiving hotspots at an approximate cost of €20,000 per hotspot. The first call for proposals amounting to €20million is likely to be launched in late 2017, although no date is yet confirmed.

Details of the exact administrative process for applicants, are yet to be decided at technical level, and details of arrangements will follow in due course from the European Commission. It is however known that the hotspots will be paid for through a voucher scheme. The European Commission is working closely with EU Member States including Ireland to determine the logistics of the eventual process. It is not known how many hotspots Ireland will receive overall. However, the principle of geographical balance across Member States will apply so that Ireland should receive a proportionate share.

The potential applicants in Ireland’s case will likely be local authorities, with any local authority eligible to apply as long as their applications fulfil the conditions set by the European Commission.

Officials in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are actively engaging with the European Commission on this proposal and are monitoring developments closely.

Office for Internet Safety

1763. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 105 of 31 May 2017, the status and work programme of the interdepartmental implementation group; the number of times it has met since being set up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27261/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The interdepartmental implementation group established following the publication of the Internet Content Governance Advisory Group’s Report met four times, most recently on 1 June 2016.

Out of 30 recommendations made in the report, 14 relate to the transfer and further development of functions currently in the Department of Justice & Equality to the Department of Children & Youth Affairs; 7 recommendations have been implemented as a result of general policy improvements; and a further 7 will be considered once the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive has been adopted.

It is my intention to report to Government by the end of the year regarding the implementation of each of the recommendations contained in the ICGAG report.

Media Mergers

1764. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will publish the report the BAI supplied to him regarding the proposed merger of two print media companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27371/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am keen to ensure that my Department's process of assessing Media Mergers is as transparent as possible, and to that end I intend to publish the phase 1 assessment reports of previous Media Mergers which have been approved since 2015 when cases started to be assessed under the revised Competition Act 2002.

My Department has written to the parties involved in the first six Media Mergers with a view to identifying any material contained in these reports which they consider to be of a commercially sensitive nature. Once my Department has considered the views of the parties in this regard, and any commercially sensitive information is redacted, I will publish the reports.

In relation to the case referred to by the Deputy, it is my intention to publish the relevant reports, including that submitted by the BAI, as soon as possible, having due regard for commercial sensitivity. My Department is to begin consulting with the parties over the coming weeks with a view to identifying any commercially sensitive information which should be redacted.

Question No. 1765 answered with Question No. 1735.

Question No. 1766 answered with Question No. 1730.

Departmental Contracts

1767. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27448/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has not awarded any contracts to the company referred to in the Question since March 2011. The information regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Interdepartmental Working Groups

1768. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the interdepartmental working groups which are working on the issue of renewable energy supports; and the membership details of each. [27617/17]

1769. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the working groups in his Department working on renewable energy and renewable energy supports; and the details of their membership. [27619/17]

1772. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the interdepartmental working groups concerned with renewable energy; and the details of their membership. [27679/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1768, 1769 and 1772 together.

Within my Department there are a number of Departmental and inter-Departmental Working Groups, working on a range of policy initiatives, across the broad area of renewable energy and renewable energy supports. Details of the membership of each Steering Group, including Working Groups under the relevant Steering Group, are set out in the following table.

Department and Inter-Departmental Working Groups	Membership
Low Emissions Vehicle Task Force Steering Group and 3 Working Groups	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Department of Taoiseach Department of Finance Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation National Transport Authority Transport Infrastructure Ireland Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland Local Government Management Agency City and County Council
Bioenergy Group Steering Group and 4 Working Groups	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Office of Government Procurement Office of Public Works Gas Networks Ireland Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland City and County Council Environmental Protection Agency National Parks and Wildlife Service Teagasc NewERA

Department and Inter-Departmental Working Groups	Membership
Offshore Renewable Energy Group Steering Group and 3 Working Groups	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport Department of Arts, Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs The Marine Institute Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland Geological Survey of Ireland Environmental Protection Agency National Parks and Wildlife Service Commission for Energy Regulation Eirgrid Irish Maritime Development Office IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland
Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Steering Group and 1 Working Group	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland NewERA
Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) Steering Group and 2 Working Groups	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation NewERA

The membership list is not exhaustive and membership may be broadened from time to time as deemed appropriate.

Better Energy Homes Scheme Applications

1770. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a person (details supplied) can qualify for further grant aid; if some method of insulation can be provided under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27636/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme on behalf of my Department. The scheme provides energy efficiency upgrades free of charge to people who meet the eligibility criteria. Typical measures available under the scheme include attic and cavity wall insulation, draught proofing, lagging jackets and low energy light bulbs. The measures currently offered under the Warmer Homes schemes were selected as the best balance that could be achieved between the resources that the Exchequer can provide to the scheme, the number of homes that can receive support and the energy savings that can be delivered. In short, the measures supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost to the highest number of people.

External insulation while effective at insulating homes not suitable for cavity wall insulation, typically costs multiples that of cavity wall insulation. For example, under the Better Energy Homes scheme, the grant available for cavity wall insulation is €300. For the external insulation of a detached home it is €4,500. Therefore providing external insulation under the Warmer Homes scheme would mean that much fewer people could benefit from the scheme each year.

However, with the additional resources I have secured in the Budget for energy efficiency this year, SEAI are now providing a limited number of deep retrofits to the homes of those

people who are living in the poorest homes. Every person who applies to the Warmer Homes scheme has their home surveyed by a professional contractor. When those surveyors find an applicant who is living in a home that is in a particularly poor condition they will recommend the person for a deeper set of measures. What measures will be recommended will depend on what the surveyor finds. However, in general, the surveyors will look at factors including the age of the home, the construction of the wall, the age of the heating system or where one is absent. SEAI are currently recruiting contractors to deliver these deeper measures and I expect works to start this July .

Gas Networks Ireland

1771. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to extend a gas line to Cavan town (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27677/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The development and expansion of the natural gas network is in the first instance a commercial matter for Gas Networks Ireland (GNI), which is mandated under Section 8 of the Gas Act 1976, as amended, to develop and maintain a national system for the supply of natural gas that is both economical and efficient. The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is statutorily responsible for all aspects of the assessment and licensing of prospective operators who wish to develop and/or operate a gas distribution system within the State under the Gas (Interim) (Regulation) Act 2002. I have no statutory function in relation to either the routing of gas pipelines or the connection of towns to the gas pipeline network.

The CER network connections policy stipulates that in order for any town to be connected to the gas network certain economic criteria must be met, which provide that over a certain period the costs of connecting the town are recouped through consumption of gas and associated tariffs. The key factor which would qualify a town, or group of towns, in any future review would be a significant increase in demand for natural gas, usually resulting from the addition of a new large industrial or commercial facility.

In my view, the wider question needs to be addressed as to whether network extensions should, where economically feasible and in line with our energy policy goals in the White Paper, provide for the possibility of future connections in order to contribute to regional and rural development. At the launch of the Action Plan for Rural Development I set out my view that there are communities partly or sometimes wholly excluded from basic criteria of modern convenience and comfort, in terms of communications, energy efficiency and fuel poverty. My long-standing position on the gas network is that it should be developed generally in rural Ireland to provide natural gas to as many areas as possible.

Greater accessibility to alternative and lower carbon intensive energy sources should present opportunities to encourage householders and businesses to make more sustainable energy choices. Accordingly, and against the backdrop of the energy policy White Paper, I am commissioning a study on the wider costs and benefits of gas network extensions, to include possible climate and decarbonisation aspects, as well as the regional and rural development benefits such as in supporting rural centres. I intend that a preliminary report will be delivered before the end of 2017.

Question No. 1772 answered with Question No. 1768.

Post Office Network

1773. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will request a report from An Post regarding the future of the post office and postal service in Howth town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27699/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Issues relating to the Post Office Network are an operational matter for the Board and management of An Post and not one in which I, as Minister, have any statutory function. I have, however, forwarded your request to An Post and asked that they respond directly to you with the information sought.

Departmental Expenditure

1774. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27705/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department has not made any payments to the company referred to in the Question. The information regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Question No. 1775 answered with Question No. 1730.

Energy Schemes

1776. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the warmth and wellbeing scheme in the northside of Dublin; if a person (details supplied) can be included under the new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27753/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Warmth and Wellbeing scheme is a pilot initiative being delivered under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The main aim of the scheme is to demonstrate the positive effects that making homes warmer and more energy efficient can have on the health and wellbeing of people in energy poverty who are living with a chronic respiratory condition. An independent research project will assess the impact the scheme is having. At the conclusion of the scheme and with independent evidence on its effectiveness, the potential for a wider rollout will be considered. As it is a pilot scheme, the main aim of which is carrying out research to form an evidence base, eligibility is limited. The operational area for the scheme was selected as Community Health Area (CHO) 7, following consultation with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This CHO encompasses Kildare/West Wicklow, Dublin West, Dublin South City and Dublin South West. Within CHO 7 the need to build capacity in the local public health and Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) teams, and establish communications on the pilot with the local community, meant that further narrowing of the area was necessary and Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24 were selected as the current operational areas.

The Deputy may also be aware that the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme is available

on a nationwide basis to low income households who are at risk of energy poverty. The family that the Deputy mentions may be eligible for that scheme. More information on this scheme is available on SEAI's website at: http://www.seai.ie/Grants/Warmer_Homes_Scheme/About_the_BEWH.html or freephone: 1800 250 204.

Public Service Obligation Levy

1777. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the rationale behind pricing the public service obligation levy for energy at 40%; his plans to reduce this levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27796/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Public Service Obligation Levy has been in place since 2001. The PSO levy consists of a set of support schemes designed to facilitate national electricity policy objectives for renewables, indigenous fuels and security of supply. The PSO has supported the connection of over 3,000 MW of renewable energy to the electricity grid and it will continue to support the development of renewable energy so that we can meet our target of increasing renewable electricity penetration to 40% by 2020.

International studies have shown that Ireland has had one of the lowest per unit supports for renewable energy in the European Union.

The calculation of the level of the PSO is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). The proposed PSO Levy for 2017-2018 is €496.5 million. The biggest driver for the proposed levy increase is the increased deployment of renewables. The 40% increase for domestic customers represents an increase of €2.37. This means the levy proposed for domestic customers is €8.27 per month, for small commercial customers it is proposed to be €28.79 per month and the proposed monthly levy for medium/large commercial customers is €3.74/kVA.

I am very conscious of the impact of energy costs on industry and households alike. Customers can avail of discounts in the retail electricity market, either by contacting their supplier directly or by using the CER accredited comparison websites, such as bonkers.ie or switcher.ie, to switch to discounted tariffs.

Question No. 1778 answered with Question No. 1730.

Appointments to State Boards

1779. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if any former Deputies have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28211/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There have been no former TDs appointed via the Public Appointments Service to state boards under my remit.

Graffiti Policy

1780. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action

and Environment if funding can be made available through the environment fund as had previously been done or through other funding sources to local authorities to help clean up graffiti in their area. [28059/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Under the Litter Pollution Act, 1997, the primary responsibility for management and enforcement responses to litter pollution, including the defacement of structures by writing or other marks, lies with local authorities. The Act provides significant powers to local authorities to deal with these issues, including on-the-spot fines. It is a matter for each local authority to decide on the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean-up actions to deal with graffiti, taking account of local circumstances and competing priorities. As part of the targeted direct response to deal with graffiti, my Department operates an Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme (ALAGS). Under this Scheme, local authorities can apply for funding for projects aimed at raising awareness of litter and graffiti issues. Local authorities are asked to focus their activities under the scheme on young people and, in particular, on schools and community groups with an emphasis on encouraging long term behavioural change. Compared to 2016, I have increased funding for the ALAGS scheme in 2017 by 28% and allocated a total of €884,000 to local authorities.

While I currently have no proposals to introduce a grant specifically targeted at the clean-up of graffiti, I understand that the Probation Service, under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality, operates two graffiti removal projects, based in Dublin and in Cork, as part of its Community Service Scheme.

Departmental Meetings

1781. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if employees of his Department, including Met Éireann employees, have attended the meetings of a group (details supplied); and if so, if they have reported back to his Department on the proceedings of the meetings of the group. [28063/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): No officials from my Department have attended any meetings of the group referred to in the Deputy's question. With respect to position of Met Éireann, this body is a constituent part of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

1782. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if upgrade works on the national broadband scheme will take place in Brownstown, Kilclone, County Meath. [28099/17]

1783. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if upgrade works on the national broadband scheme will take place in Collinstown Kilcloon, County Meath. [28100/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1782 and 1783 together.

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.

In April, eir signed an agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas. 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 Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. Quarterly updates will be published on the Departments website.

The decision by eir to invest in infrastructure to deploy high speed broadband services to an additional 300,000 premises in rural Ireland was taken purely on commercial grounds. Neither I nor my Department have a statutory authority to direct eir in this regard.

I also published in April an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The Map shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

The map shows that 7%% of the townland of Brownstown (Ed Culcimmin) and 69% of the townland of Kilclone falls within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP. The remaining 93% of the townland of Brownstown (Ed Culcummin) falls within the BLUE area and will be served by commercial operators and 31% of the townland of Kilclone falls within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018 (Light BLUE on map). Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

A formal procurement process is in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. The finalisation of the

State Intervention Area for the procurement process is an important milestone as it means that bidders can progress their business plans and the Department can move to the next stage of the procurement. The three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The State Intervention network will be a wholesale network and retail service providers will be able to use the network to provide enhanced broadband services to their customers.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP, once contracts are in place.

The Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the network once a contract is awarded.

In this regard, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force in July 2016 together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available at the following link:<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>. In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, I signed regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band. On 22 May, ComReg announced the result of its 3.6 GHz spectrum award which will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. In my Department's Estimates for 2017, I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances. These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

Postal Services

1784. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an impact analysis has been conducted regarding the increase in the prices for An Post services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28113/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As a commercial State company, pricing strategies and related matters are the responsibility of the Board and management of An Post. In recognition of the exceptionally difficult financial situation facing An Post the Government agreed, in late 2016, to give An Post increased pricing freedom in order to enable the company to increase prices in the short term and generate much needed cash flow. In this regard the Communications Regulation (Postal Services) (Amendment) Bill 2016 was published on 22 December 2016. The Bill passed through the Oireachtas and was signed by the President on 15 March 2017. I made the necessary Commencement Order giving effect to the repeal of the price cap mechanism on the 21 March 2017. A Regulatory Impact Assessment was undertaken in the context of the Bill.

Waste Disposal

1785. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage of households he estimates that do not avail of an authorised waste collection service; if he ensures that local authorities investigate whether these households manage their waste in an environmentally acceptable manner in accordance with legislation and waste management plans; and the level of monitoring by local authorities of these households' waste disposal practices. [28118/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The most recent published figures for the number of households availing of a three bin collection service are set out in the report Performance Indicators in Local Authorities 2015 which indicates that approximately 575,000 or 35% of households are availing of such a service. The figures availing of a kerbside collection service are considerably higher. The 2012 National Waste Report suggested some 72% of households avail of at a kerbside collection service. A copy of the 2015 Performance Indicators report is available on the Local Government Management Agency website at <http://www.lgma.ie/sites/default/files/2015-pi-report.pdf> Each local authority is responsible for the supervision and the enforcement of the relevant provisions of the Waste Management Act in relation to the holding, recovery and disposal of waste within its functional area. Local authorities have specific powers under the Act to require measures to be taken, or to take measures directly, to prevent or limit environmental pollution caused or likely to be caused by the holding, recovery or disposal of waste, and to mitigate or remedy the effects on the environment of such activity.

My role, as Minister, is to provide the legislative and policy framework under which both local authority and Environmental Protection Agency enforcement action is initiated. Enforcement action against illegal waste activity is a matter for the local authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement of the EPA as appropriate.

Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) have been established in each of the three existing waste regions, with responsibility for coordinating waste enforcement actions and ensuring consistent enforcement of waste legislation while still leaving local authority personnel as first responders on the ground to specific breaches of waste legislation. This will facilitate a transformation from process-driven enforcement, structured around separate implementation of individual regulations, to one that focuses greatest effort on the waste problems and issues that matter most and to take swift, proportionate and effective action.

Household waste management compliance including brown bin is a priority area for enforcement in 2017 for the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities.

Underpinning waste enforcement is state funding for waste enforcement officers. I have

made €9 million available from the Environment Fund this year to support the Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities and the recruitment and continued employment of a network of local authority waste enforcement officers. This investment is critical in providing an enhanced response on the ground to other infractions of the waste code.

In terms of investigation whether households manage their waste in an environmentally acceptable manner, certain local authorities have introduced bye-laws which require householders to sign up to a household waste collection service. The Regional Waste Management Planning Offices are currently preparing a template to help standardise bye-laws on the presentation of waste. The draft template bye-laws place the onus of proof on the householder to prove that they are managing their waste correctly by signing up to a waste collection service or providing receipts for the deposit of waste in authorised facilities. If adopted by the elected members of a local authority, such bye-laws would also place an obligation on householders to segregate food waste in area's where a separate food waste bin must be provided. The Regional Waste Management Plans also contain further measures to identify areas of low collection and to work with communities and collectors to address this issue.

Postal Codes

1786. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28135/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, was awarded a 10 year contract in December 2013 to develop, implement, maintain and promote the use of the National Postcode System "Eircode".

The costs and the amount spent by my Department of designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system from 2011 to-date are set out below in tabular form:

Contractual Costs	Expected Cost to the Exchequer over the life of the Contract (VAT inclusive)	Paid to 31 May, 2017 (VAT inclusive)
Design of NPS	€ 3.20m	€ 3.20m
PSB Database Encoding	€11.50m	€11.50m
Launch and Dissemination	€ 3.77m	€ 3.77m
Ongoing Maintenance and Dissemination Costs	€14.75m	€ 0.11m
Subtotal	€33.22m	€18.58m
Other Costs		
Specialist and Staffing Costs	€ 4.80m	€ 2.84m
Total Cost	€38.02m	€21.42m

Energy Schemes

1787. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a new refit 3 scheme is due to be put in place to replace the existing refit 3 scheme; when it is likely to be put in place; and the tariff rate a 0.5 MW solar renewable energy

supplier can expect to be paid and for which period in years (details supplied). [28479/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy in Ireland. This builds on the 2015 Energy White Paper and recognises that solar has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby also enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. Analysis is on-going on a range of renewable technologies to be included. This analysis includes an assessment of the cost of supporting Solar Photovoltaics - both rooftop and ground-mounted, at various scales.

Once this work is complete, my Department will publish a final public consultation on the design elements of the new support scheme. Details will be advertised on my Department's website at www.dccae.gov.ie. There will be several decisions to be made on this new scheme with regard to scale, technologies and, in particular, how communities will have a greater involvement than in previous schemes.

Subject to final scheme design, Government approval and EU State Aid clearance, it is expected the new scheme will be open for new applications in 2018.

Energy Policy

1788. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans introduce a new price support scheme in respect of renewable energy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28606/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for Government sets out that Ireland's long-term interests are best supported by further decreasing our dependence on fossil fuels through the continued development of renewable electricity generation. This is underpinned by the Energy White Paper which sets out a framework that will guide policy in the energy sector from now until 2030. It sets a vision of reducing emissions from the energy system by between 80-95% by 2050. My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) designed to assist in meeting our renewable electricity targets out to 2030. This will be guided by the direction of European policy as set out in the Clean Energy Package that is currently under negotiation.

A detailed economic assessment of a range of renewable electricity generating technologies is currently underway and a public consultation on certain design principles of the proposed new RESS will be published next month. Details of this second and final public consultation will be advertised on the Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. The introduction of any new scheme - including the overall costs and technologies to be supported - will be subject to Government approval and State Aid clearance from the European Commission.

It is expected that the new scheme will open for applications in 2018.

Energy Schemes

1789. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the renewable heat incentive scheme will be introduced; the rate to be paid

per kilowatt hour; the rate to be paid per size of boiler; when this scheme will be fully operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28607/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is a commitment in the Programme for Government and will be the primary support mechanism in the heating sector designed to meet Ireland's 2020 renewable energy obligations. The aim of the RHI is to build on the progress already made in the renewable heating sector and to help reach Ireland's 12% target by 2020. Provisional data indicates that 6.6% of heat demand was derived from renewable sources in 2016. My Department has undertaken a detailed economic assessment on the design and cost of the RHI for the industrial/ commercial sector in Ireland. This assessment included a range of renewable energy technologies and focused on large commercial and industrial heat users in the non-Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).

Before any RHI scheme is introduced, the overall costs and technologies to be supported will be subject to Government approval and State aid clearance from the European Commission. Only when the final design of the scheme is approved will the tariff rates be published. I expect to be in a position to announce details of the new scheme by the end of the year.

Warmer Homes Scheme Eligibility

1790. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider extending the warmer homes scheme to include applicants over 66 years of age to avail of heating upgrade works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28627/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) administers the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme on behalf of my Department. The scheme provides energy efficiency upgrades free of charge to people who meet the eligibility criteria, regardless of their age. Typical measures available under the scheme include attic and cavity wall insulation, draught proofing, lagging jackets and low energy light bulbs. The measures currently offered under the Warmer Homes schemes were selected as the best balance that could be achieved between the resources that the Exchequer can provide to the scheme, the number of homes that can receive support and the energy savings that can be delivered. In short, the measures supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost to the highest number of people.

The average cost of a full heating system with heating controls for a standard house is approx. €7000. This is far in excess of the cost of the current measures offered. Therefore providing this under the Warmer Homes scheme would mean that much fewer people could benefit from the scheme each year.

However, with the additional resources I have secured in Budget 2017 for energy efficiency, SEAI are now providing a limited number of deep retrofits to the homes of those people who are living in the poorest homes. Every person who applies to the Warmer Homes scheme has their home surveyed by a professional contractor. When those surveyors find an applicant who is living in a home that is in a particularly poor condition they will recommend the person for a deeper set of measures. What measures will be recommended will depend on what the surveyor finds. However, in general, the surveyors will look at factors including the age of the home, the construction of the wall, the age of the heating system or where one is absent. SEAI have procured additional contractors to deliver these deeper measures and I expect works to start in July.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

1791. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28665/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): All of the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department have confirmed that they are tax compliant for the year 2015. In relation to the 2016 accounts all of those Bodies which have submitted accounts to date are also in compliance. There are a number of Bodies which have yet to submit their 2016 accounts due to differing statutory deadline requirements, but all will be requested to confirm compliance with tax laws in accordance with the code of practice for the governance of State Bodies.

Broadband Service Provision

1792. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he will respond to correspondence sent to him by a person (details supplied). [28706/17]

1793. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be upgraded and provided in Gernonstown, Slane, County Meath; and if his attention has been drawn to the current download speeds in the area, which are often as low as 0.88 Mbps. [28722/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1792 and 1793 together.

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.

In April, eir signed an agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas. 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 Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. Quarterly updates will be published on the Departments website.

The decision by eir to invest in infrastructure to deploy high speed broadband services to an additional 300,000 premises in rural Ireland was taken purely on commercial grounds. Neither I nor my Department have a statutory authority to direct eir in this regard.

I also published in April an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. The Map shows the extent of the State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map provides information on a county by county basis with a breakdown of coverage across the townlands in every county. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

The map shows that 24% of the townland of Gernonstown, Co. Meath, including the individual address detailed in the question, falls within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP. The remaining 76% of the townland of Gernonstown falls within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018 (Light BLUE on map). Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibre-rollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

A formal procurement process is in train to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. The finalisation of the State Intervention Area for the procurement process is an important milestone as it means that bidders can progress their business plans and the Department can move to the next stage of the procurement. The three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

The State Intervention network will be a wholesale network and retail service providers will be able to use the network to provide enhanced broadband services to their customers.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to rollout a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP, once contracts are in place.

The Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand.

The Programme for Government also commits to measures to assist in the rollout of the

network once a contract is awarded.

In this regard, I established a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task Force in July 2016 together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available at the following link:<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/communications/en-ie/Pages/Publication/Report-of-the-Mobile-Phone-and-Broadband-Taskforce.aspx>. In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, ComReg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers. The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, I signed regulations allowing ComReg to proceed with the allocation of spectrum in the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band. On 22 May, ComReg announced the result of its 3.6 GHz spectrum award which will provide an 86% increase in total spectrum available for mobile and fixed wireless services. In my Department's Estimates for 2017, I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances. These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

1794. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when his Department will complete development of a new renewable electricity support scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28728/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter target also being legally binding. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to facilitate the development of solar energy projects in Ireland. This builds on the commitment in this area in the 2015 Energy White Paper.

With respect to renewable electricity, my Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. Analysis is on-going against a range of commercial renewable technologies at various scales and includes an assessment of the cost of supporting Solar Photovoltaics (PV) - both rooftop and ground-mounted. The assessment also includes analysis of the optimum financial support mechanisms for renewable technologies, in line with the 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines.

My Department will shortly publish a public consultation on the design of the new support scheme. Following the outcome of this public consultation, and before any new scheme is introduced, it will need to secure Government approval and state aid clearance from the European

Commission. Subject to this, it is expected that the new scheme will become operational in 2018.

I am fully aware of the level of interest in the solar PV sector in Ireland, by both state-owned and private-sector companies. I am advised that there have been over 550 applications, amounting to about 3,900 Megawatts of solar capacity, seeking a connection to the electricity grid in the last 18 months.

Notwithstanding the level of solar applicants seeking connection to the grid, my stated position is that while solar has a role to play in Ireland's energy future, we cannot have a situation where a new support scheme leads to a disproportionate increase in people's electricity bills through the Public Service Obligation levy. In designing the new RESS, the cost implications for people and businesses will, therefore be a high priority and I will ensure that the new scheme is designed in a cost efficient manner and will take advantage of falling renewable costs.

Finally, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland currently provides supports for the use of solar thermal heating technology to both large industry and SMEs. Households can also avail of grant support for investment in renewable energy installations, including solar thermal, under the Better Energy Homes Scheme.

EU Directives

1795. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to the Minerals Bill 2015, if the environmental risks are being treated pragmatically or in compliance with Directives on Water Habitat and Sustainability; the details of his Department's observance of the Aarhus Convention; if the Minerals Bill 2015 contains a capital allowance of 120% as reported in the public domain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28874/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): All minerals exploration activities must comply with the EU Habitats Directive and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. Screening is undertaken to ascertain whether or not the exploration activity is likely to have a significant effect on the environment and as such whether or not it is subject to Article 6 of the Aarhus Convention or a requirement for appropriate assessment under the Birds and Habitats directives and regulations. Where a licensee wishes to prospect within the footprint of a Natura 2000 (European) Site, or in close proximity to one, my Department may require the licensee to carry out a more detailed environmental assessment, involving the preparation of an Appropriate Assessment Screening. Such a statement requires input from an ecological specialist, and entails field surveys and site investigations. If the activity is determined likely to have a significant effect, the licensee is required to prepare a Natura Impact Statement which is submitted to the local authority for consideration.

In addition to carrying out Appropriate Assessment Screening determinations, my Department also ensures that all mineral exploration drilling activities comply with the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations, 2010 (S.I. No. 9 of 2010).

Environmental matters in respect of mining activities are considered in the context of the Planning Application. Planning Permission for mining activities is required from the relevant Local Authority (or, on appeal, from An Bord Pleanála), and an Integrated Pollution Control Licence from the Environmental Protection Agency. This position continues under the Minerals Development Bill 2015.

Section 7 of the Minerals Development Bill clarifies that a Mining Licence or any other permission granted under the provisions of the Bill will not affect any requirement under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992 or the Waste Management Acts 1996 to 2011.

Sections 203 to 206 of the Minerals Development Bill 2015 address obligations under the Aarhus Convention ratified by Ireland in 2012. These provisions provide that the Minister, prior to making a decision which will permit activities where the Planning and Development Acts do not apply, must determine whether such activities may have a significant effect on the environment, and thus whether the activity is captured by Article 6 of the Aarhus Convention. The Minister is required to publish any such determination made and the reasons for the determination together with the procedure for seeking judicial review. Provision is also made for the public to have a right of participation in and ease of access to justice to review decisions where an activity is permitted that may have a significant effect on the environment.

The Minerals Development Bill 2015 does not contain provisions in respect of capital allowances. The taxation of minerals exploration and mining activities is dealt with under Part 24 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Certain exploration and mining expenditures benefit from capital allowances designed to encourage investment in exploration. Changes were made to the available capital allowances in the Finance Act 2011. The 120% allowances previously available do not apply to expenditure incurred after December 2010. Expenditure incurred after that date qualifies for an allowance of 100%.

Question No. 1796 answered with Question No. 1738.

Waste Management Regulations

1797. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will review waste management regulations in the wake of the recent incident at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29025/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Industrial Emissions installations are subject to a range of regulatory controls under national legislation, including the conditions attached to a licence issued by the Environmental Protection Agency on the operation and management of such sites. The Agency has particular expertise in ensuring the protection of human health and the environment from activities with potential for significant pollution through its licensing system. I am satisfied that the necessary legislative and policy framework is currently in place and that the plant is and will continue to be subject to the appropriate statutory controls.

Telecommunications Services Expenditure

1798. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost that would be incurred by the Exchequer by introducing a universal service obligation to ensure a quality mobile phone service for all parts of the country. [29029/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The current EU and national regulatory framework for telecommunications allows

for the application of a Universal Service Obligation (USO) in respect of fixed voice services. This framework has, in my view served consumers well over several decades and ensured that householders can get an affordable fixed voice service, regardless of where they are located. There are no provisions in European or national regulation for a USO in relation to mobile voice services. Mobile operators are however rolling out 3G and 4G networks across Ireland following ComReg's 2012 Multiband Spectrum auction, with at least one operator now having over 90% population coverage of 4G services. Given that such a USO is not facilitated in the legislative framework, the issue of the cost of introducing such a scheme has not arisen.

However, I am aware that the rate of demand for data services has increased by 500% in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for mobile operators, regulators and policy makers both in Ireland and internationally. Recognising this challenge, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force. In July 2016, I established the Task Force together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available on both Departments' websites.

In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, Com-Reg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers.

In order to maintain momentum created by the Task Force, I, together with Minister Humphreys, established an Implementation Group. This group is driving and monitoring the implementation of the actions, bringing together all key stakeholders identified in the Task Force report with responsibility for delivery. This group will be formally reporting every 90 days on progress made on all actions. Last week, I published the first such quarterly progress report, which is available on my Department's website at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Task-force%20Q1%20Progress%20Report.pdf> and which shows that considerable progress has been made, particularly in relation to the implementation of actions identified for Q1 2017.

The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, following regulations which I signed last year, ComReg recently announced the results of its auction for the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which means an 86% increase in spectrum capacity to meet the growing demand for mobile and wireless broadband services across rural and urban areas. The Regulator has awarded 15 year licences for the rights of use in this band which will provide a degree of stability and create future investment certainty. Spectrum was also awarded in lots covering 9 urban and rural regions across the country.

In my Department's Estimates for 2017, I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances.

These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

In parallel, the National Broadband Plan aims to deliver high-speed services to every city,

town, village and individual premises in Ireland, through private investment and a State intervention in areas where commercial investment plans have not been fully demonstrated.

Departmental Staff Relocation

1799. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29034/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Staff who wish to transfer to other departments apply through the Central Applications Facility (CAF), which is operated and maintained by the Public Appointments Service, or directly, if appropriate to the relevant department they wish to transfer to. My Department does not directly accept or process applications with regard to transfer requests to other government departments or agencies outside of Dublin. Any relocation costs are borne by staff members, with no cost to the Department.

Energy Schemes

1800. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will extend the warmer home scheme to landlords that agree to make their properties available to HAP participants for at least three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29103/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am committed to increasing energy efficiency activity in the rented sector. People living in rented accommodation are twice as likely to live in a home that is E, F or G rated on the Building Energy Rating (BER) scale. This means that those with the least means to improve the condition of their home are also likely to be paying higher energy bills.

The Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty commits to piloting an initiative to allow landlords participating in the Local Authority led Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) schemes to receive free energy efficiency upgrades

My officials are currently working with Local Authorities to agree the terms and conditions for this pilot. This would be trialled initially with a small number of Local Authorities and the findings from this would inform consideration of a wider rollout.

Better Energy Communities Programme

1801. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will consider putting in place public community energy advisors to engage and inform hard to reach energy users that would most benefit from energy efficiency and advice programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29104/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), my Department has

created a range of supports to broaden the reach of energy efficiency schemes. Under the Better Energy Communities scheme a pool of funding is made available each year to community projects that encompass upgrades to homes, community facilities and local businesses. This year 47 communities will receive more than €26m in funding. Local energy agencies, who have been successfully working around Ireland in recent years to bring together communities, are involved with many of these projects. In addition, SEAI provides capacity-building assistance to communities through the Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC) network. This is a support network dedicated to community organisations who want to develop a sustainable energy system in their local area. An SEC aims to be energy efficient, to use renewable energy where feasible and to develop decentralised energy supplies. The community can include all the different energy users in the community including homes, sports clubs, community centres, churches and businesses. At present there are 90 Communities in the network, with two more joining up this week.

SEAI has appointed a panel of experts to help these community groups. As soon as a community group joins the network a mentor will make contact with to see how they can help develop the SEC. For 2017, €700,000 in capital funding has been made available to support the SEC network and my intention is to develop a multi-annual pipeline for the scheme that will build capacity in communities to take on more ambitious sustainable energy projects and projects of scale in the coming years. I would encourage any community who wants to improve their technical capabilities and have support from the SEAI in planning and implementing their sustainable vision for their community to engage with the SEAI and the SEC scheme.

The list of regional mentors is set out in the table below:

REGION	MENTOR(S)
Border	IT Sligo
Dublin	IT Sligo
West	Energy Co-operatives Ireland
Midwest	Tipperary Energy Agency
Southwest	XD Consulting
Southeast	Kilkenny Leader Partnership
Mideast	Future Fit
Midlands	ORS

The Warmth & Wellbeing pilot scheme, which offers deep energy efficiency upgrades to people in energy poverty who are suffering from respiratory conditions, was specifically established to reach vulnerable people through the health system and support them through deep renovation of their homes. Participants are referred to the scheme by health care professionals and HSE staff in those areas where the pilot is active. Officials from my Department are also working with staff from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to establish a new efficiency scheme targeted at participants in the Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme.

Through these and other new pilots in development I will continue to prioritise new and innovative methods of encouraging more people to take advantage of the benefits that energy efficiency brings.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1802. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application for a sports capital grant by a club (details supplied) in County Kerry;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27985/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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 are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Departmental Staff Data

1803. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form. [29257/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy regarding the number of staff employed in my Department is outlined in the table below as at 31st May 2017.

County	Staff Numbers
Dublin	347
Clare	66
Donegal	17
Galway	13
Limerick	1
Cork	9
Kerry	44

In relation to the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department, I have asked the agencies to provide the Deputy with the information requested. If you do not receive a reply from the agencies within ten working days, please inform my private office.

Bus Services

1804. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve bus services serving the Dublin 15 area; the position regarding the bus rapid transit routes for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26519/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) recently launched the *BusConnects* initiative which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) that will involve, inter alia, the development of a network of ‘next generation’ bus corridors and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations. I am seeking additional funding for public transport investment in the mid-term review of the Capital Plan to support this initiative.

The NTA’s Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035 includes proposals for two specific Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Schemes - Blanchardstown to UCD, and Clongriffin to Tallaght. Funding is being made available for initial planning and design work for the Blanchardstown to UCD BRT under the Government’s Capital Plan ‘Building on Recovery

Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021'. I understand from the NTA that following from a recent tender competition a design team has now been appointed to progress the design and planning documentation for the scheme.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Traffic Legislation

1805. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are differences in the rules for the time heavy goods vehicles can be on roads here in comparison to roads in the European Union; if this affects increased traffic on roads here late at night; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26521/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland does not have a nationwide system of rules for when heavy good vehicles (HGVs) may use roads. Some EU Member States do apply certain nationwide restrictions on times of use of HGVs, such as barring HGVs at certain hours at weekends.

Under the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) Regulations 1997 (S.I. No. 182 of 1997), as amended, local authorities may restrict access to roads in their areas in accordance with the height or weight of a vehicle. These restrictions may apply permanently or for specific periods. It is a matter for the local authorities to determine on which roads to impose such restrictions and, if the restriction is not permanent, the periods during which they apply.

I believe that it is appropriate for Irish circumstances that local authorities, who are responsible for traffic management within their functional areas, should be the bodies to decide whether to restrict the use of HGVs on certain routes and the times at which to do it.

As Ireland has no single nationwide policy on times when HGVs may be used, a comparison with those EU Member States which do have such policies would not be meaningful.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1806. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide funding under the sports capital programme to a group (details supplied). [26523/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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 2320 applications are being assessed by officials in my Department. 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.

Bus Services

1807. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the continuous downgrading of bus services on the route between Kilcullen, County Kildare and Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26528/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Funding

1808. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding or grant aid which is available to a group (details supplied) in order to fund a trip to play in a sporting tournament abroad. [26581/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes. Sport Ireland channels funding for sport through the relevant recognised National Governing Bodies of Sport. Sport Ireland has no mechanism to allocate funding to organisations outside of this process. Sport Ireland recognises the Football Association of Ireland as the National Governing Body for Football. The Group may wish to contact the Football Association of Ireland directly to enquire about funding streams which may be available through their social inclusion programmes. Contact details are: Tel: +353 1 8999 500, Email: info@fai.

There is no funding or grant aid available through my Department for the purpose outlined by the Deputy.

Public Transport

1809. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to manage bus coaches in Dublin city during June 2017 until September 2017 when 50 new spaces are expected to become available in view of the reduction in available parking spaces for coaches due to the Luas works and other parking restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26583/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including the Luas Cross City Project. The NTA consult on a regular basis, with various stakeholders at the Luas Traffic Forum, regarding the impacts of works on traffic issues associated with the project, including parking which comes under the remit of Dublin City Council, who are a member of the Forum.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Provision

1810. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps which have been taken to require local authorities to provide safe and attractive cycling routes to public transport stations and stops in pursuance of policy 8.1 of the National Cycle Policy Framework. [26598/17]

1811. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress which has been made in providing as a pilot project to begin with guarded indoor bicycle parks with capacity from several hundreds up to several thousands at rail stations or major public transport hubs in pursuance of policy 8.3 of the National Cycle Policy Framework. [26599/17]

1812. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress which has been made in developing a range of national and local promotional campaigns encouraging the wider benefits of cycling such as freedom, the fastest way of getting around, sociability of cycling, lack of running costs, health benefits and ecological benefits in pursuance of policy 10.1 of the National Cycle Policy Framework. [26600/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1810 to 1812, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, while significant progress has been made under a number of objectives contained in the National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) it has not been possible for my Department, other Government Departments' and Local Authorities to deliver on many of the objectives due to the significant scaling back in overall public investment since the launch of the NCPF in 2009.

However, the NCPF has been integrated into the Development Plans of the majority of Local Authorities, thus ensuring that the objectives and policies to support and promote cycling are taken into account in current and future planning.

In relation to cycling infrastructure, good progress is being made developing cycling routes in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and throughout the country under funding provided directly by my Department under the *Smarter Travel* funding programmes and through the Sustainable Transport Management Grants and Regional Cities funding programmes that are administered by the National Transport Authority (NTA) on behalf of my Department. Further progress will be achieved in the coming years under the new *BusConnects* initiative recently launched by the NTA which, in addition to delivering a network of 'next generation' bus corridors, will also provide segregated cycling facilities on each of these corridors.

Good work is also taking place in promoting behavioural change to encourage more people to take up cycling. My Department provides funding to the NTA on an annual basis for the delivery of behavioural change programmes such as Workplace and Campus travel programmes and the Green Schools Programmes. Furthermore my Department engaged Cycling Ireland to develop a new national cycle training standard - "Cycle Right" - which is currently being rolled out in many primary schools. In addition my Department provides funding to local authorities throughout the country to assist in organising events and activities during Bike Week which is taking place this year between the 10th and 18th June.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1813. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when sporting clubs and organisations will be advised whether or not their capital sports grants applications have been successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26647/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All of the 2,320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process. It is expected

that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Bus Services

1814. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the new National Transport Authority bus transport proposals for Dublin BusConnects and the subsequent redrawing of the city's bus routes will see Dublin Bus operate those routes; if the NTA has plans to licence private bus operators on some of these new radial and orbital routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26655/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) recently launched the BusConnects initiative which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) that will involve, inter alia, the development of a network of 'next generation' bus corridors and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations.

As regards the operation of services on the redesigned network, under EU and Irish legislation, the NTA has the statutory power to assess the appropriate mix of directly awarded and competitively tendered public service transport contracts. It utilises its statutory powers with a view to ensuring value for money in terms of the use of taxpayers' money in securing the provision of public transport services. The Deputy is likely aware that the NTA is currently finalising procurement competitions in relation to approximately 10% of current directly awarded PSO services. These competitions relate to current Bus Átha Cliath services (Dublin Metropolitan competition) as well as current Bus Éireann services (Dublin Commuter and Waterford competitions). I understand the NTA expects to announce the completion of these competitions over the summer/autumn period. This position is not impacted by the BusConnects initiative.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Driver Licences Applications

1815. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a driving licence renewal for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26659/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. 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.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

1816. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an agreement has been finalised with British Columbia on the conversion of driver licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26662/17]

1837. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects British Columbian licences to be exchanged for Irish licences when a person goes to

live there in view of the fact that in British Columbia Irish driving licences are exchanged for British Columbian driving licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27167/17]

1838. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reciprocal arrangement which is in place between the State and the government of British Columbia, Canada in order to allow holders of driving licenses that are granted in British Columbia to drive on roads here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27174/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1816, 1837 and 1838 together.

Ireland has successfully reached agreement on driving licence exchange with a number of Canadian provinces to date and work is progressing on an agreement with British Columbia which I expect to have in place shortly.

Driving licence exchange agreements take time to arrive at, and require the relevant authorities on each side to study and compare the two licensing regimes, so that each side can be satisfied that they are compatible. On the Irish side, this task is undertaken by the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

The RSA has reached an agreement in principle with British Columbia. It will be necessary to arrange formal signing, after which I as Minister will sign an order under the Road Traffic Acts giving effect to the agreement. I look forward to doing this in the near future.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

1817. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications from each constituency of Dáil Éireann for the 2017 sports capital fund; and the timeframe for a decision to be made regarding same. [26677/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A list of all applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme is available on the Department's website www.dttas.ie. The information is displayed on a county basis. All of the 2320 applications are being assessed by officials in my Department. 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.

Ministerial Meetings

1818. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of meetings he has held with tourism groups (details supplied) on initiatives for tourism in County Cork; the dates these meetings took place; and the initiatives and areas within these sub regions that were discussed, in tabular form. [26678/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have not met with any of the tourism groups mentioned by the Deputy. However, my colleague Patrick O'Donovan TD, in his capacity as Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, met with Visit Cork, which is the principal stakeholder collaborative group for the development and promotion of tourism in Cork, covering the entire county and city. Visit Cork was established by the local authority with membership from the key private and public sector partners, including industry and relevant representative bodies. Deputy O'Donovan met recently with Visit Cork, on 5 June 2017, when he received an update on the work of the group and discussed ways to improve and expand

tourism to the region.

As the Deputy will be aware, the main work on specific tourism programmes and initiatives is conducted at an operational level by the tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland - Fáilte Ireland primarily in relation to the development of tourism in the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East areas; and Tourism Ireland regarding overseas promotional opportunities.

Road Projects

1819. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the feasibility study commissioned under the capital plan for the northern relief road at Mallow, in which the plan is identifying a route; and the engagement he has had with Cork county council on the matter. [26725/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport Provision

1820. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to connect Dundrum to St Vincent's University Hospital via public transport [26776/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and procuring the provision of public transport services in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1821. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the 2017 sports capital programme; when decisions on applications will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26784/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): All of the 2,320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process. It is expected that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Public Transport

1822. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of dedicated floor area onboard a bus in the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann fleet; the corresponding information for a carriage in the DART and Irish Rail fleet for wheelchair users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26846/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Events

1823. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent to date by his Department and/or the Exchequer on the Rugby World Cup bid 2023; the draft guarantees by the State to support the staging of the tournament under the general scheme of a Rugby World Cup 2023 Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26850/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The disbursement of funds in support of the bid to host Rugby World Cup 2023 is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. In this regard, I am advised that Fáilte Ireland has paid €767,500 in grant-aid to support the RWC2023 bid since 2015, from a total grant approval of €1,220,000. The proposed guarantees sought as part of the bid are not in place as they are currently under negotiation while the bidding process is ongoing and no monies have been spent as a result of these draft commitments.

Driver Test

1824. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive a date for a driving test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26851/17]

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.

Rural Transport Services Provision

1825. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to improve rural transport connections nationwide. [26885/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am fully aware of the important role played by public transport in ensuring connectivity for rural communities. This Government has supported that role through the 11% cumulative increase I secured in Budget 2017 for both the Public Service Obligation (PSO) programme and the Rural Transport Programme. That increase means that in 2017 approximately €277million be available to the

National Transport Authority to support the delivery of these important programmes, which underpin the delivery of taxpayer funded bus services across rural Ireland. I have committed publicly to further increasing the funding of those programmes in the future as resources allow. That Exchequer financial support is supported at a policy level by the commitment given within the Programme for a Partnership Government to review public transport policy so as to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy. I am glad to say that this commitment is also reflected within the actions contained within Realising our Rural Potential - Action Plan for Rural Development which specifically references the rural transport dimension and the needs of rural communities.

During 2016 the Rural Transport Programme was expanded further with the addition of 21 new regular commuter bus services and the increase of €2.19m in funding provided to the programme in 2017 will allow for further improvement in existing services and the development of new services.

Publicly funded bus services in rural Ireland are expanding and improving and that is reflected in the increases in passenger numbers, particularly within Bus Éireann's PSO network.

As well as those bus services, many rural towns also benefit from a connection to the main-line rail network. Increased funding to Iarnród Éireann in recent years has allowed for improved services and facilities across the network. I expect to receive the NTA's report soon on the recent consultation period held on the Rail Review Report 2016, a report which outlined issues for consideration on the role of rail generally in Ireland.

Rail Services

1826. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure the provision of extra carriages at peak times on the Sligo to Connolly, Dublin, train service. [26886/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Brexit Negotiations

1827. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26911/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and

will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these. In my Department the main risks include:

- minimising the impact of Brexit on the tourism industry by preserving the Common Travel Area, avoiding a hard border on the Island of Ireland, and maintaining a liberalised aviation regime to protect and promote access.
- maintaining in so far as possible the existing common standards and regulatory regimes (e.g. international haulage, maritime).
- the avoidance of a hard border between North and South, and the most efficient possible customs arrangements on the Island of Ireland and between Ireland and Great Britain.
- the protection of the fully liberalised and deregulated aviation market and current aviation traffic rights with respect to the various air transport markets.
- the treatment of EU and UK airlines as well as EU and UK nationals in terms of ownership and control rules.

Ministerial Meetings

1828. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of meetings he has held to date and scheduled with his EU counterparts, UK counterparts and European Commission director general level counterparts dealing specifically with Brexit related issues or on which the impact of Brexit was an agenda item, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26914/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have had a number of meetings with my EU counterparts, UK counterparts and the European Commissioner on Brexit, most recently at the Transport Council in Luxembourg last week. These meetings were extremely useful in promoting an understanding of transport and tourism Brexit implications for Ireland and are summarised in tabular form below.

Date	Name of Minister/ EU Official	Role/title	Country/Institution	Subject of meeting
12/12/16	Minister Chris Hazard	Minister for Infrastructure	Northern Ireland Executive	NSMC matters and Brexit
04/04/17	Prof. Péter Balázs	European Coordinator for the North Sea Med Corridor Connecting Europe Facility Core Corridor	EU: European Commission	Implications of Brexit on TEN-T
25/05/17	Minister Anna Johansson	Minister for Infrastructure	Sweden	Brexit, Road safety
26/05/17	Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling	Secretary of State, Department for Transport	UK	Brexit

Date	Name of Minister/ EU Official	Role/title	Country/Institution	Subject of meeting
08/06/17	Commissioner Violeta Bulc	European Commis- sioner for Transport	EU: European Commission	Brexit and Euro- pean Issues
08/06/17	Jörg Leichtfried	Minister for Trans- port, Innovation and Technology	Austria	Brexit and Road Safety

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1829. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a driving test for a person (details supplied) can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26948/17]

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.

National Transport Authority

1830. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will contact the National Transport Authority regarding the need to introduce an early morning local link service along the N16 corridor (details supplied) in view of the demand for such a service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26962/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Sector Pensions Data

1831. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26980/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is seeking specific pensions information for employees in the public bodies under the aegis of my Department, I have asked those public bodies to provide the Deputy with the information requested. If you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please advise my private office.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1832. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected timeframe for a decision to be made on applications to the 2017 sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27019/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All of the 2320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process. It is expected that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1833. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons waiting to sit their driving tests in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the waiting times for the first five months of 2017 for driving tests in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27028/17]

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.

Disability Act Employment Targets

1834. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; and the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27145/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and all agencies under the Department's remit are subject to specific legal obligations set out in the Disability Act 2005. Part 5 of the Act sets out a requirement for public service bodies to meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities. The National Disability Authority (NDA) reports on compliance with this 3% target and currently my Department exceeds the target with 3.8% of employees with disabilities.

The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) was launched by the Government on 2 October 2015. The Government has already taken a number of key decisions as recommended in the Strategy including:

- the public service employment target for people with disabilities will be increased on a phased basis as set out in the Strategy from 3% to 6%.
- special public service competitions for people with disabilities will be arranged and alternative recruitment channels will be opened up for people with disabilities.

These and other recommendations of the Strategy are being considered by a cross-party group chaired by Mr Fergus Finlay .

In regard to the number of staff with disabilities employed by agencies under the aegis of this Department this is a matter for the Agencies themselves. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to them for their direct response. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Sports Capital Programme Eligibility

1835. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding can be made available from a special fund for a club (details supplied) in County Cork. [27149/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the Government’s primary vehicle to support the development of sports facilities and the purchase of sports equipment. The programme aims to foster an integrated and planned approach to developing sports and physical recreation facilities throughout the country. Under the terms of the SCP, grants are allocated to sporting organisations towards the provision of new facilities, the renovation or extension of existing facilities or the purchase of non-personal sports equipment. A new round of the SCP closed for applications on the 24th February and all of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a number of months to complete the assessment process. It is expected that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Outside of the SCP, my Department does not administer any separate special capital fund for projects such as the one highlighted by the Deputy. The club could apply for funding under any future rounds of the SCP. It may also be possible for the club to raise funds via the ‘Tax relief for Donations to Certain Sports Bodies’ scheme (section 847A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997). This is a Revenue Commissioners operated scheme which offers tax benefits to individuals or companies who make donations to sports clubs. Further details on this scheme and how it operates can be found on the Revenue Commissioners website.

Air Pollution

1836. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the low emissions vehicles taskforce referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 21 of 2 November 2016, his plans to legislate for the introduction of electric, hybrid and biogas vehicles within the local authority fleet. [27164/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Clean and energy efficient vehicles have an important role to play in achieving Ireland’s policy objectives of reducing energy consumption and lessening CO₂ and pollutant emissions.

As the Deputy is already aware, my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, jointly have convened an interdepartmental Low Emission Vehicles (LEV) Taskforce to consider the range of measures and options available to Government for the purpose of accelerating the deployment of low carbon technologies. This Taskforce has been divided into three working groups which cover three key areas; Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility; Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing; and Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership.

Working Group One of this Taskforce, which includes representatives from the Office of Government Procurement, will, as part of their deliberations, consider current public procurement policy in the context of Government and public body leadership initiatives and opportunities, as a means of further demonstrating support for LEV uptake. An opportunity will be provided for stakeholders and interested members of the public to contribute their perspectives to the deliberations of the Task Force, details of which will be made available on my Department’s website in due course.

Please note that currently local authorities are responsible for their individual fleet procurement; comprehensive guidance is available through the “Action Plan on Green Public Procurement” and “Green Procurement Guidance for the Public Sector”. Additionally, the EU Commission has recently carried out an Impact Assessment for the possible revision of the “Clean Vehicles Directive” (2009/33/EC). As the Deputy may already be aware, this is a public procurement-related instrument which requires public bodies to consider certain energy and environmental impacts when purchasing road vehicles. My Department recently participated in the consultation phase of this assessment, and attended the associated stakeholder engagements at EU level.

Questions Nos. 1837 and 1838 answered with Question No. 1816.

Road Projects Expenditure

1839. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to the Exchequer of the design and construction of the M1 Dundalk western bypass PPP project; the estimated Exchequer contribution to the operational and maintenance costs on an annual basis; and the percentage of these costs that come from toll charges. [27377/17]

1840. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost to the Exchequer of the design and construction of the N8 Rathcormac Fermoy bypass PPP Project; the estimated Exchequer contribution to the operational and maintenance costs on an annual basis; and the percentage of these costs that come from toll charges. [27378/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1839 and 1840 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Furthermore, the statutory power to levy tolls on national roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into agreements relating to tolls on national roads is vested in Transport Infrastructure Ireland under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 as amended.

In view of the above I have referred the Deputy’s question to the TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don’t receive a reply within 10 working days.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects

1841. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if TII is considering using a design, build finance and maintain PPP or a concessions, build operate transfer PPP agreement to progress the Metro North project. [27379/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As part of its work on a mid-term Review of the Capital Plan, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has set up a High Level Group to provide the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform with an evidence-based analysis and recommendations on the future role of using PPPs (and concessions) as a procurement option in the delivery of capital infrastructure, compared to traditional procurement methods. I understand that this will include an assessment of risks arising from traditional as compared to PPP procurement of large capital projects. Full decisions on the ap-

appropriate financing arrangements for the new Metro North project do not fall to be made yet, and will occur at a later point, after detailed design and planning work on the project has been completed. Decisions on the financing aspects of the project will, of course, take account of the outcome of the present work on PPPs which is being led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Road Projects Expenditure

1842. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of designing and building the M20 motorway; and if transport agencies have explored the feasibility of building the motorway via a concessions PPP agreement. [27380/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. As the Deputy is aware, the Capital Plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. While the transport element of the Capital Plan did provide for some targeted investment in a number of new projects in the Munster region, it was not possible to include the M20 in the Capital Plan as the scale of investment to deliver it was not affordable.

TII is undertaking some early activity surveys/studies on the upgrade of the road link between Cork and Limerick and there has been some engagement, at the request of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, on options for funding such a link. The scope for progressing the project further will be reviewed once the Capital Plan Review is completed. In this context any consideration of options for implementation of the project by way of PPP would have to be within a PPP policy framework as set by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

As regards the estimated cost of an upgraded of the Cork to Limerick road link, I have referred the Question to TII for direct reply. If you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please notify my Office.

Olympic Games Ticketing Arrangements

1843. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 603 of 9 May 2017, if he and-or his junior Minister will consider the report regarding Olympic ticketing arrangements; if he will publish the report; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that funding for the OCI has not yet been considered by the board of Sport Ireland for 2017 and the board of Sport Ireland will await the findings of the Moran inquiry before a funding decision will be made in 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27415/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Judge Moran's Report was presented to officials in my Department on Monday, 12 June 2017.

On 8 June 2017, and prior to receipt of the Report, one of the parties who is referenced in the Report raised certain legal matters, by way of letters to (i) me as Minister, (ii) Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan, and (iii) the Attorney General, relating to due process and natural justice. Given the importance ensuring that due process and the tenets of natural justice are ad-

hered to, the matters raised by that party, along with the contents of Judge Moran's Report, are currently being considered by the Office of the Attorney General. I do not propose to consider the Judge's Report until after that advice has been finalised. I expect to receive that advice in the coming days.

The timing of the publication of the Report will be subject to consideration of the advice of the Attorney General, and any legal issues that may arise. It is my expectation that the Report will be published as soon as possible.

In relation to the funding aspects referred to by the Deputy, the position remains that the Board of Sport Ireland will consider those matters after the Report has been published.

Road Projects

1844. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding realignment of a road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27435/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme, the construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads, is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

North-South Ministerial Council

1845. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects the review of the Narrow Water Bridge project, agreed under the fresh start agreement and undertaken with the Northern Ireland executive will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27468/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following on from consultation with stakeholders, I understand that an options paper is being prepared for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council later in the year.

Bus Éireann

1846. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of funding Bus Éireann annually in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and the details of the amount each individual department or funding source contributes. [27469/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Bus Éireann receives Public Service Obligation (PSO) and capital funding. Since 2010 there is no PSO subvention paid directly by my Department to transport operators. The award of PSO contracts falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA), which has direct responsibility for this area along with the routes covered. The NTA also provides capital funding

to Bus Éireann for PSO Bus Fleet Replacement & Refurbishment and funding for Accessibility Projects and under the Regional Cities Programme. I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply in relation to funding allocated to Bus Éireann over the period 2011 - 2017.

In addition to this Bus Éireann receives exchequer funding from the Department of Education and Skills for the provision of school transport services and also from the Department of Social Protection in relation to the Free Travel Scheme. Therefore I have referred the Deputy's question to my colleagues Richard Bruton, TD, Minister for Education and Skills and Regina Doherty, TD, Minister for Employment and Social Protection for attention and direct reply.

Regional Airports

1847. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocation for each of the regional airports, Donegal, Knock, Kerry and Waterford for each of the years 2018 to 2022. [27470/17]

1848. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding requirements for each of the regional airports, Donegal, Knock, Kerry and Waterford for each of the years 2017 to 2022. [27471/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1847 and 1848 together.

Funding of the four regional airports at Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK), Kerry and Waterford is provided through five different schemes under the EU approved Regional Airports Programme which operates from 2015 until 2019. Capital funding under the Programme is confined to necessary safety and security related projects to assist the airports in continuing to satisfy safety and other regulatory criteria, subject to the availability of funding.

In addition to the capital support, the Programme also provides for current funding. The bulk of this comprises PSO payments in respect of two air services connecting Dublin with Donegal and Kerry, which are paid to the airline at an approximate cost of € 7.6m annually. The remainder of the current provision is used for operational cost support for the airports in the areas of safety and security.

Budget allocations for capital and current funding under the Regional Airports Programme for 2018 and 2019, are set out in the following table.

Year	Capital €m	Current €m
2018	4.85	8.8
2019	5.2	8.8

Specifically in relation to capital funding, the allocations for the years 2020 to 2022 are included in the Capital Plan 2016-2022 as set out in the following table.

Year	€m
2020	4
2021	4
2022	4.5

In early 2016, as part of a €4b jobs fund, the Taoiseach announced an extra €10m for the regional airports to guarantee their future. This commitment, together with other Programme for Government commitments of a capital nature, are currently under review as part of the Capital Plan mid-term review being undertaken by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

In relation to funding requirements, applications for capital funding are invited by the Department on an annual basis. Although some projects may be multiannual in nature, generally the projects applied for are relatively modest in scale (under €1m with most under €500,000).

The four airports have submitted their project applications for 2017 for evaluation. I expect to make an announcement on the funding allocations shortly.

The process for current funding is also undertaken on an annual basis and will be completed later this year as is normal under the Programme.

Ports Policy

1849. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of all public or governmental funding for each of the ports of Dublin, Cork, Drogheda, Dún Laoghaire, Galway, New Ross and Wicklow by funding source. [27472/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In line with National Ports Policy published in 2013, no Exchequer funding is provided to any commercial port company. National Ports Policy 2013 outlines that Irish ports must operate on a commercial basis without recourse to State funding for any activities. Ports are expected to fund their activities and capital infrastructure investment from their own resources.

Ports Policy

1850. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding that is required in each of the years 2017 to 2022 for each of the ports of Dublin, Cork, Drogheda, Dún Laoghaire, Galway, New Ross and Wicklow. [27473/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In line with National Ports Policy published in 2013, no Exchequer funding is provided to any commercial port company.

National Ports Policy 2013 outlines that Irish ports must operate on a commercial basis without recourse to State funding for any activities. Ports are expected to fund their activities and capital infrastructure investment from their own resources. This can be done in a number of ways such as using reserves or profits, selling an asset, borrowing, applying for EU funding under TEN T/CEF if eligible to apply or by attracting private investment into ports through entering into a joint venture.

Therefore, the funding of individual port operations and development is a matter for the port companies themselves and I have no role in this matter.

The port companies have development masterplans outlining their future infrastructure development over the next 30 to 40 years. A number of ports have already embarked upon a period of significant phased infrastructure investment in relation to key elements of their masterplans while a number of other port companies are at planning stage. Details of these plans are publically available on the individual Company Websites.

Road Projects Expenditure

1851. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocation for local and regional roads for 2017, 2018 and 2019. [27474/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority. Details of the regional and local road grant allocations to local authorities for 2017 are outlined in the regional and local road grant allocation booklet which is available in the Dáil Library.

While the Capital Plan 2016-2021 sets out overall capital commitments in relation to roads and current expenditure allocations are governed by the Current Expenditure Ceiling for my Department, the specific current and capital allocations for the years 2018 and 2019 will be decided as part of the annual Estimates process and will take into account the outcome of the Capital and Current Expenditure Reviews underway at present.

Rail Services

1852. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocation for Iarnród Éireann for 2017; and the projected funding allocation requirements in each of the years 2018 to 2022. [27475/17]

1853. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding requirement for Iarnród Éireann for each of the years 2017 to 2022. [27476/17]

1854. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding levels allocated for the public service obligation for Iarnród Éireann in each of the years 2010 to 2016; and the levels projected to be allocated for each of the years 2017 to 2021, in tabular form. [27477/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1852 to 1854, inclusive, together.

The Deputy is aware that funding for Iarnród Éireann is provided under separate funding programmes. The Company receives current funding for rail services under the PSO funding programme and it also receives capital funding through the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC) and also through the NTA in relation to projects within the Greater Dublin Area.

The allocation for current funding (PSO) is subject to the annual Budgetary process. The Deputy is aware that funding has increased in recent years and in 2016 for example total funding provided to Iarnród Éireann under the PSO programme increased by approximately 13.5% when compared with 2015. Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 the allocation of PSO funding to individual operators is a matter for the NTA and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

The allocation under the IMMAC is subject to a multi-annual funding framework with the current framework ending in 2018 and its renewal will be subject to discussion and agreement between the Company and my Department.

In terms of likely future funding requirements for Iarnród Éireann, the Rail Review Report 2016 sets out a detailed overview of estimated funding requirements over the period 2016 to 2021. It highlights the considerable amount of taxpayer support currently provided to support the rail network and also provides an overview of the estimated required amount of additional funding needed to support the network over that period. The NTA is currently finalising a report on the public consultation period it held in relation to the Rail Review. I understand that the consultation period elicited over 300 submissions. Upon receipt and consideration of the NTA's consultation report, I hope to report to Government before the end of the year.

Road Projects

1855. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding cycle paths; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27490/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The construction, improvement and maintenance of individual national roads (including measures concerning cycle lanes), is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting this I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days. As regards the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads this is the statutory responsibility of each local authority in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993 and in line with relevant technical standards and such technical guidance as may be issued by my Department.

Bus Services

1856. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the public bus service is a vital piece of infrastructure in rural communities; his plans to support such services and ensure there is an adequate and secure level of public transport provision in rural communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27517/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 1302 which I answered on the 2nd May 2017 (copy attached).

Dáil Question

No: 1302 To ask the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the public bus service is a vital piece of infrastructure in rural communities; his plans to support such services; if he will ensure there is an adequate and secure level of public transport provision in rural communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Joan Burton.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 2nd May, 2017.

Ref No: 20526/17 Proof: 805

Transferred (from) Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs -- 02/05/2017 --
Question No 1767 (Written)

20 June 2017

Answered by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

Shane Ross

REPLY

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 77 which I answered on the 22nd March 2017 (copy attached).

Dáil Question

No: 77

To ask the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the public bus service is a vital piece of infrastructure in rural communities; his plans to support such services and ensure there is an adequate and secure level of public transport provision in rural communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Joan Burton.

For ORAL answer on Wednesday, 22nd March, 2017.

Ref No: 11609/17 Lottery: 57 Proof: 66

Answered by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

Shane Ross

REPLY

I am fully aware of the important role the bus fulfils in ensuring public transport connectivity for rural communities. This Government has supported that role through the 11% cumulative increase I secured in Budget 2017 for both the Public Service Obligation (PSO) programme and the Rural Transport Programme. That increase means that in 2017 approximately €277million be available to the National Transport Authority to support the delivery of these important programmes, which underpin the delivery of taxpayer funded bus services across rural Ireland. I have committed publicly to further increasing the funding of those programmes in the future as resources allow. Publicly funded bus services in rural Ireland are expanding and improving and that is reflected in the increases in passenger numbers, particularly within Bus Éireann's PSO network.

That Exchequer financial support is supported at a policy level by the commitment given within the Programme for a Partnership Government to review public transport policy so as to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy. I am glad to say that this commitment is also reflected within the actions contained within Realising our Rural Potential - Action Plan for Rural Development which specifically references the rural transport dimension and the needs of rural communities.

I have no doubt the Deputy is aware that across rural Ireland the publicly funded bus services are complemented by a huge range of privately operated bus services. These bus services are provided by operators under licence from the National Transport Authority pursuant to the Public Transport Regulation Act 2009 and contrary to some reports are not solely focused on major inter-urban routes, but are also frequently found connecting rural towns and villages across the State. In 2015 around 23 million people travelled on a commercial bus service,

which represents approximately 9% of all public transport journeys that year.

The National Transport Authority has assured rural Ireland that it has the statutory powers available to it to ensure continued public transport connectivity for communities who may lose services in cases where a commercial operator introduces service changes. The NTA has used those powers in the past and will do so again in the future if required.

Traffic Data

1857. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated reduction in the number of cars on the road nationally and in Dublin during summer months when schools and universities are closed. [27673/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Any estimation of the number of cars using our roads, either on a national basis or just in the Greater Dublin Area, whether during a particular period or not, would involve the use of traffic count surveys and is entirely a matter for each local authority. I have no role in the matter.

Ministerial Meetings

1858. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the last date he met formally with the chairperson and CEO of Dublin Port Company; the issues discussed; when he will next meet the chairperson and CEO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27692/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy that I met formally with the Chairperson and CEO of Dublin Port Company on the 30th March 2017. We discussed several issues pertaining to the Port including the National Ports Policy, the Company's continued growth, the Alexandra Basin redevelopment project to address capacity requirements and the Company's Masterplan. In the context of the importance of the Poolbeg SDZ to Dublin Port Company, the possibility of locating a film studio in the vicinity was also discussed.

The Deputy will be aware that I hosted an All Ireland Transport Sectorial Meeting in Dundalk in January to discuss the many possible implications of Brexit across all transport sectors. Senior personnel from Dublin Port were at this forum. In addition senior officials from my Department are in regular contact with the Port Company.

Departmental Expenditure

1859. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27717/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy will find details of all external expenditure on my Department's website at the following link [External Expenditure](#).

Integrated Ticketing

1860. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department or a body under its aegis have considered the possibility of integrated ticketing and fares across two or more of the public transport company services, especially for those using Leap cards; and his views on whether there should be an ability for public transport users to use more than one form of public transport without a financial penalty as there is at present. [27721/17]

1861. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether it would be desirable and encouraging for more integrated public transport usage if leap card weekly fare caps were applied for all CIÉ and Luas services trips not only if a person uses just one form of transport (details supplied). [27722/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1860 and 1861 together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Public Transport Provision

1862. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department or a body under its aegis have considered plans to integrate the scheduling of Dublin Bus, DART and commuter rail services at certain locations in order to enable persons to experience the rail and bus services as a network and to make connections easier. [27723/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is the statutory body with responsibility for the integration of services in respect of public transport services provided under public service contracts and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects

1863. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27739/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the Listowel Bypass) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Tourism Ireland Expenditure

1864. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the Tourism Ireland marketing budget spent in each country since 2010. [27877/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is an operational matter for Tourism Ireland and one in which I, as Minister, have no role or function. Tourism Ireland is responsible for promoting the island of Ireland as a visitor destination overseas. I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Ports Development

1865. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of subsidiaries which have been approved for establishment by Drogheda Port Company; the percentage shareholding held in each case; the declared justification for each; if the consent of the Minister for Finance was obtained for each approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27878/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy that Drogheda Port Company has established two Subsidiary companies namely Fast Terminals Limited in which it holds a 50% shareholding and Bremore Ireland Port Limited in which it holds a 100% shareholding. It is the statutory objective of each port company, inter alia, to take all proper measures for the development of its harbour, to promote investment in its harbour and to engage in any business activity either alone or with others, to develop its harbour. Both of these subsidiary companies were established following consideration by the Board of its statutory remit.

The approval of both the Minister for Transport Tourism and Sport and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to the establishment of these subsidiaries was given as required under Section 17(2)(b) of the Harbours Act 1996 as amended by the Harbours Act 2015.

Fast Terminals Limited was established in partnership with Fast Herco Limited to provide stevedoring services in the port.

Bremore Ireland Port Limited was established to develop a new deep water port at Bre-more. In the intervening years since its establishment the economic and policy perspective has changed significantly. Since the publication of the National Ports Policy 2013 which specifies that large scale infrastructure projects will be led by ports of national significance, no further investment has been made by Drogheda Port in this regard.

Traffic Management

1866. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions his Department and the NTA are taking to prevent congestion times increasing in 2017 and 2018 on the M50 and on all main city bound routes (details supplied); his plans to bring 2017 and 2018 congestion levels back to 2015 levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27987/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I recognise that there is considerable evidence emerging of increased travel demand across the Dublin region in general, with growing traffic levels on many of the region's roads and streets. With regard to the M50, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), along with other stakeholders are continuing

to implement a number of measures on the M50 to manage demand and optimise operational efficiency, including: changes to merge and diverge layouts at junctions; the introduction of permanently signed emergency routes; increased incident access points; increased provision of incident response units; and enhanced interagency co-ordination to improve incident management. TII have also established a project team to manage the design and procurement of a system of mandatory variable speed limits for the M50 and are progressing this project in 2017.

Insofar as congestion issues in Dublin are concerned, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has overall responsibility for the implementation of their published Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). Congestion isn't confined to a single corridor in the Dublin Region and it cannot be solved on focusing on just one or two corridors. It needs an approach that addresses the whole region. Last month, the NTA launched BusConnects – a plan to tackle congestion in the GDA by overhauling all aspects of Dublin's bus system including:

- Building a network of “next generation” bus corridors on the busiest bus routes to make journeys faster, predictable and reliable;

- Introducing Bus Rapid Transit, a higher quality of bus routes to make journeys faster, predictable and reliable;

- A complete redesign of the bus network to connect more places and carry more people;

- A state of the art ticketing system and cashless payment system;

- A revamped fare system to provide a simpler fare structure;

- Implementing new bus branding;

- Rolling out new bus stops; and

- Transitioning to new bus fleet using low emission vehicle technologies;

Delivering BusConnects will take a number of years, but the advantage of a bus-based solution is that implementation can start quickly and can ramp up depending on the level of funding available each year. With sufficient investment, and subject to planning approvals, the benefits of BusConnects can start coming on stream from 2019. My Department will continue to work closely with the NTA on the BusConnects project and on intensifying efforts to combat congestion across Dublin in the short to medium term.

Bus Services

1867. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the publication of bus connects by the NTA, the process and timeframe to identify specific sites to provide bus-based park and ride facilities for Dublin city bound commuters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27988/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) recently launched the *BusConnects* initiative which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) that will involve, inter alia, the development of a network of ‘next generation’ bus corridors and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations. I am seeking additional funding for public transport investment in the mid-term review of the Capital Plan to support this initiative.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Public Transport Initiatives

1868. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his submission regarding the mid term capital review includes plans to advance and progress the LUAS Lucan line project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27989/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the implementation and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The NTA's *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035* provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades. As the Deputy is aware, the strategy proposes the future development of an east-west Luas line commencing in the residential areas of Lucan and connecting into Dublin City Centre. The Government's current Capital Plan *'Building on Recovery: Infrastructure & Capital Investment 2016-2021'*. The focus of my Department's submission to the Capital Plan review in relation to public transport is on funding for the bus network as the bus system will be key to tackling congestion in the short to medium term. As the Deputy will be aware, the NTA recently launched the *BusConnects* initiative which will radically overhaul the bus system so that it represents a modern, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable transport option for users. This will involve a complete redesign of the bus network and the development of a "next generation" of bus corridors serving all areas of the city.

The development of the east-west luas line from Lucan, while part of the longer-term transport strategy for the GDA, will not be progressed within the lifetime of the current Capital Plan.

Road Safety Strategy

1869. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Ministerial Committee on Transport met recently; if so, the outcome of the meeting; if the mid term review regarding the road safety strategy 2013 to 2020 has been published by the Road Safety Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27990/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The main purpose and the intended outcome of the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety is to examine road fatality/serious injuries trends, to review implementation of the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020, and to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss and put forward orientations, in addition to giving feedback to other stakeholders on relevant road safety issues, and to assist in refining road safety policies and programmes.

The Ministerial Committee on Road Safety has held twice yearly meetings since 2013 up to end 2016. I have increased the frequency of these meeting to at least quarterly. The Committee has already held two meetings in quarter one 2017 with a further meeting held on 22 May 2017, and I am holding a further meeting next month to keep up the momentum regarding road safety. I am satisfied that the Committee is playing a key role in information sharing, facilitating discussions, and in assisting in refinements of policies between road safety stakeholders. I am pleased that fatalities are down 15 as at Tuesday 13 June 2016 by comparison with the same period last year.

Last November I held a mid-term review of the Road Safety Strategy as we were roughly at the half way point of the Government's eight year Road Safety Strategy (2013-2020). The purpose of the review was to oversee the implementation of the Road Safety Strategy, to examine the Road Traffic Fatality / Serious Injury Trends and to determine what actions we can implement to reduce the incidences in these trends.

I expect to receive a draft of the review from the Road Safety Authority for my consideration shortly.

Tourism Industry

1870. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the publication of tourist figures by the CSO showing a 5.9% year on year decrease on the number of overseas visits from Great Britain, if this trend is continuing; the steps he is taking to arrest this decline in visitors from Great Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27991/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The most recent CSO data showing a decline in the number of British visitors to Ireland this year are a concern. The depreciation in sterling since the Brexit vote means that competitiveness and value for money are more important than ever. Through the the tourism agencies, we are working both to protect our share of the British market and also to promote diversification into other markets. Fáilte Ireland is actively working on a number of fronts to assist the diversification and development of our tourism industry and the attractiveness of our tourism product offering. As well as already offering a suite of business supports to the sector, it is finalising details of a new targeted Brexit Response Programme. The Brexit Response Programme will focus on building capability in the tourism industry to ensure that the relevant skills and insights are available to tourism enterprises and will provide a range of practical supports to hundreds of businesses. Furthermore, ongoing work to develop the main experience brands and enhance visitor experiences, both through current programme supports and targeted capital investment in attractions and other tourism infrastructure, will also boost Ireland's appeal to key target markets and priority consumer segments.

Tourism Ireland has put an extensive programme in place in Britain with an increased focus on publicity. It is leading a high level tourism industry delegation to London this week to discuss how the agencies and tourism industry can best respond to the challenges posed by Brexit. A series of further actions are being considered including specific initiatives to promote the border counties to potential GB visitors.

Market diversification is an important part of the response to Brexit. In this context, the strong performance of the North American and European markets is reassuring. This is particularly the case when one considers that visitors from these markets tend to stay longer and deliver higher average revenue.

Sport Ireland

1871. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the conditions attached to women in sport funding as allocated by the sports partnerships and the Irish Sports Council; the objectives of the funding; if results are benchmarked based on allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28040/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes, including the Women in Sport programme. Sport Ireland channels its funding through the relevant National Governing Bodies of Sport and through its network of Local Sports Partnerships.

As this is matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Sport and Recreational Development

1872. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason project FUTSAL for Ballymun and Finglas has ceased; and if he will reconsider this decision. [28077/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), as the National Governing Body for Football. National Governing Bodies (NGBs), including the FAI, are independent, autonomous bodies. I have no role in, or responsibility for, operational matters of NGBs. The Deputy may wish to contact the FAI directly. Contact details are: Tel: 01 8999 500, Email: info@fai .

Air Navigation Orders

1873. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of munition of war permits issued to date in 2017 under Article 5 of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973; the details of the date the aircraft operator, the locations they were flying to and from and cargo being carried that required the permit; if he has refused permit requests in that period; if so, the details of the aircraft operator; and the basis on which the permit request was refused. [28114/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department has recently started to publish on its website a *Monthly Report on Munitions of War Exemptions issued under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order, 1973, (S.I. No. 224 of 1973)*. This can be accessed by the Deputy via the following link <http://www.dttas.ie/aviation/publications/english/statistics-munitions-war> (latest figures available are up to the end of May 2017). The remainder of the information sought by the Deputy, in tabular form, will be forwarded to the Deputy.

In relation to the 16 refusals detailed in the tabular statement, these were all refused on the advice of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Fishing Vessel Licences

1874. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions that have been taken by the marine survey office against owners of fishing vessels that refuse to submit log books. [28117/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I answered a similar question from Deputy Jan O'Sullivan on 26 January 2017. Owners and Skippers of Irish Fish-

ing Vessels of 25 Gross Tonnage and upwards are required under the Merchant Shipping Acts to maintain a log for the vessel and to enter into an agreement with their crew. These two requirements are combined into a single document called a Fishing Vessel Logbook.

These Fishing Vessel Logbooks should commence on, or as soon as a vessel is next operational, after 1st January and 1st July each year. They should run for a maximum period of six months, expiring on 30th day of June or 31st day of December, as the case may be and immediately after that date they should be returned to the Mercantile Marine Office (MMO) of my Department.

As commercial sea fishing is regulated by the Fisheries Acts, 1959 to 2006 and comes under the remit of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, my Department would not maintain data on licensed fishing vessels at any period in time or the number of licenced operating vessels required to submit logbooks during any 6 month period.

The requirement to submit Fishing Vessel Logbooks to my Department arises in the context of the safe operation of the vessel and the welfare of the crew. The Marine Survey Office of my Department carries out surveys and inspections of fishing vessels and enforces compliance with the requirements regarding official logbooks, including where appropriate, the prosecution of offenders through the courts.

Postal Codes

1875. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28147/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's National and Vehicle Driver File (NVDF), which contains details of registered vehicles and licensed drivers in this country, is fully capable of accommodating and processing Eircodes. The Departments online systems, including www.motortax.ie which enables vehicles be taxed online, can also accommodate Eircodes.

The cost of making the necessary NVDF software and other operational adjustments required is set out below in tabular form, as requested.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

1876. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeframe for the approval of the 2017 sports capital programme applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28183/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All of the 2,320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Ferry Services

1877. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding ferry services post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28184/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I can confirm to the Deputy that Brittany Ferries currently operates a ferry service between Cork and Rosscoff. Ireland is well serviced in terms of ferry connectivity as the market offers a diverse range of viable maritime links in and out of the State. There are currently six shipping lines providing passenger and ro-ro services, with, depending on the time of year, up to 226 weekly departures from Ireland to Britain and continental Europe. In addition there are 15 lolo only operators with 64 weekly departures from Ireland, with a number operating direct to the continent.

My Department has no function in, or finance for, the provision or subsidisation of ferry services. We are bound by EU state aid rules and the limitations these impose.

In the year since the UK voted to leave the European Union, there has been no discernable negative impact on port and shipping activity. Trade through the ports has remained strong: according to the latest iShip Index published by the Irish Maritime Development Office, shipping and port activity in the Republic of Ireland rose by 6% in the first quarter of 2017.

As part of my Department's preparation for Brexit, there has been wide engagement with sectoral stakeholders and I am aware that a significant proportion of goods destined for EU markets use the UK landbridge to access these markets. The efficiency of these routes could be affected by Brexit, particularly if there were increased border and custom procedures and delays, or if the UK applied differing standards, road charging or regulatory regimes.

Shipping services are market driven. In the past, ferry operators have responded to market developments and increased capacity when required. I expect ferry services to develop and adapt to changing market demands and conditions following Britain's exit from the EU but will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

1878. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a list of the successful applicants for the sports capital grants will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28233/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All of the 2,320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Rural Transport Services

1879. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for investment in rural routes; his further plans to ensure that there will be transport services in rural Ireland to accommodate local communities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28241/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am fully aware of the important role the bus fulfils in ensuring public transport connectivity for rural communi-

ties. This Government has supported that role through the 11% cumulative increase I secured in Budget 2017 for both the Public Service Obligation (PSO) programme and the Rural Transport Programme. That increase means that in 2017 approximately €277million is available to the National Transport Authority (NTA) to support the delivery of these important programmes, which underpin the delivery of taxpayer funded bus services across rural Ireland. I have committed publicly to further increasing the funding of those programmes in the future as resources allow. Publicly funded bus services in rural Ireland are expanding and improving and that is reflected in the increases in passenger numbers, particularly within Bus Éireann's PSO network. That Exchequer financial support is supported at a policy level by the commitment given within the Programme for a Partnership Government to review public transport policy so as to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy. I am glad to say that this commitment is also reflected within the actions contained within Realising our Rural Potential - Action Plan for Rural Development which specifically references the rural transport dimension and the needs of rural communities.

The restructuring of the Rural Transport Programme, involving the establishment of 17 Local Link offices, has positioned the Programme to better integrate with other public transport services. It also provides a solid base to expand or adapt services to meet current and future identified needs. A total of 21 new regular commuter bus services were developed in 2016 including the addition of more regular services. The additional funding of €2.19m provided to the Programme in 2017 allows for further improvement of existing services and the development of new services.

The NTA has the statutory powers available to it to ensure continued public transport connectivity for communities who may lose services in cases where a commercial operator introduces services changes. The NTA has used those powers in the past and will do so again in the future if required.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Projects

1880. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Transport Infrastructure Ireland has plans for a motorway (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28344/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Swimming Pool Programme Data

1881. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount allocated and recouped respectively under the local authority swimming pool programme in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in each local authority. [28634/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Details of all allocations and payments under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme from 2011 to date in 2017 are published on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/allocations-and-payments>.

Severe Weather Events Expenditure

1882. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the costs associated with the adverse winter of 2015 to 2016 in relation to the roads; the amount of funding that each local authority sought; and the amount of Exchequer funding that was given to each local authority to remedy the damage. [28643/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The initial estimate of the cost of repairs to national, regional and local roads arising from the severe weather in late 2015 and early 2016, based on returns from local authorities, was €88m.

This was followed by Government agreement in January 2016 to allocate €106m to assist in the repair of storm and flood damage to transport infrastructure, including repairs to national, regional and local roads and the rail network. The regional and local road allocation included funding set aside from my Department's Vote as well as additional funding made available by Government.

Local authorities were requested to provide detailed submissions before allocations were made for repairs to regional and local roads. The cost of the work included in these submissions amounted to €137.7m in total and a breakdown per county is given in the table. Following consideration of these submissions, the bulk of the available monies was allocated to local authorities in February to facilitate getting work programmes underway as quickly as possible - these Tranche 1 allocations are set out in the table.

It was explained to local authorities that a limited amount of funding was being retained to allow for the further assessment of damage, for example, to bridges and that the balance of the available funding would be allocated in May. The Tranche 2 allocations are as set out in the table.

Road Authority	1st Tranche RLR Requests	1st Tranche Allocations	2nd Tranche RLR Requests	2nd Tranche Allocations	Severe Weather Payment 2016	
	€	€	€	€	€	
Carlow County Council	314,250	314,250	1,206,875	600,000	906,768	
Cavan County Council	3,593,500	2,600,000	2,030,000	300,000	2,900,000	
Clare County Council	3,313,090	2,800,000	2,026,831	800,000	3,600,000	
Cork County Council	13,284,552	11,000,000	3,061,750	450,000	11,550,000	
Cork City Council	1,866,291	300,000	1,081,412	-	300,000	
Donegal County Council	9,064,695	7,000,000	1,700,000	400,000	7,394,746	

Road Authority	1st Tranche RLR Requests	1st Tranche Allocations	2nd Tranche RLR Requests	2nd Tranche Allocations	Severe Weather Payment 2016	
	€	€	€	€	€	
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	545,000	545,000	-	-	17,111	
Dublin City	40,240	40,240	-	-	39,105	
Galway County Council	8,195,206	6,000,000	4,491,408	400,000	6,504,332	*
Galway City	16,585	16,585	-	-	16,585	
Kerry County Council	5,200,213	4,000,000	4,395,475	650,000	4,650,000	
Kildare County Council	1,364,900	350,000	1,008,900	100,000	417,651	
Kilkenny County Council	4,753,505	3,000,000	3,743,160	300,000	3,300,000	
Laois County Council	2,001,450	1,500,000	497,100	300,000	1,798,396	
Leitrim County Council	2,764,600	1,800,000	1,166,200	250,000	2,049,985	
Limerick Council	5,825,383	4,000,000	3,742,367	400,000	4,297,590	
Longford County Council	1,708,045	1,200,000	609,545	200,000	1,399,995	
Louth	-	-	458,863	250,000	247,324	
Mayo County Council	7,383,851	5,000,000	4,084,024	500,000	5,465,564	
Meath County Council	993,000	400,000	2,047,500	300,000	786,820	
Monaghan County Council	8,793,812	5,000,000	3,831,165	150,000	5,150,000	
Offaly County Council	2,887,899	1,800,000	1,762,299	200,000	1,994,426	
Roscommon County Council	9,603,000	4,500,000	5,821,950	400,000	4,900,000	
Sligo County Council	7,996,087	4,000,000	4,529,301	350,000	4,350,000	
Tipperary County Council	8,209,221	5,000,000	5,881,653	350,000	5,334,385	
Waterford County Council	19,502,000	7,000,000	9,204,800	350,000	7,350,000	
Westmeath County Council	4,789,523	3,000,000	1,011,500	300,000	3,299,959	

Questions - Written Answers

Road Authority	1st Tranche RLR Requests	1st Tranche Allocations	2nd Tranche RLR Requests	2nd Tranche Allocations	Severe Weather Payment 2016	
	€	€	€	€	€	
Wexford County Council	3,057,200	2,200,000	1,674,600	250,000	2,745,581	*
Wicklow County Council	598,533	598,533	712,030	450,000	1,048,533	
Total	137,665,631	84,964,608	71,780,708	9,000,000	93,814,856	

* Total drawdown for Galway County and Wexford County includes carryover from a 2015 allocation .

Local authorities were given flexibility to prioritise projects when drawing up their programme of works and informed that the Department of Public Expenditure, in approving the additional funding for repair works, had stipulated that the monies involved had to be drawn down in 2016 and that for that reason works listed in returns for implementation in 2017 could not be considered for funding.

With regard to funding allocated to address the impact of the severe weather in late 2015/early 2016 on national roads, details of the drawdown of funding for these roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

1883. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28677/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All the agencies within my Departments remit have confirmed that they fully complied with their obligations under tax law for 2015. With regard 2016 all the commercial agencies under my Department's remit have fully confirmed their compliance with their obligations under tax law with the exception of CIÉ. CIÉ requested an extension to their delivery of the 2016 Financial Statements and Chairperson's Report, due to the circumstances surrounding Bus Éireann which was granted by my Department. Of the non-commercial agencies, the Commission for Railway Regulation, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the Marine Casualty Investigation Board have confirmed their compliance, while the remaining agencies are currently awaiting the C&AG's sign off of their 2016 accounts.

I expect a report to be submitted to my Department by each of the outstanding agencies in the near future.

Taxi Ranks

1884. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his

views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the new location of the taxi rank in Tralee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28705/17]

1885. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the decision by Kerry County Council to relocate the taxi rank in Tralee town centre as part of ongoing redevelopment works is one that cannot be reversed due to his Department's planning policy; if this decision can be renegotiated to make amendments to address concerns of taxi operators in Tralee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28725/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1884 and 1885 together. Decisions regarding the location and operation of taxi ranks are a matter for the relevant local authority which is responsible for the making of bye-laws in respect of its functional area. Section 25 of the Taxi Regulation Act, 2013 provides for both the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the Garda Commissioner to be consulted by a local authority when it is proposing to make such bye-laws. I have no function in the matter.

I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Wild Atlantic Way Project

1886. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for the exclusion of the Seven Heads peninsula, including Courtmacsherry, Butlerstown and other villages and town lands from the southern leg of the Wild Atlantic Way; and if he will request Fáilte Ireland to reconsider this decision in view of the fact it is redirecting visitors away from this very picturesque and interesting coastal route and unfairly and unnecessarily disadvantaging local tourism businesses. [28857/17]

1895. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the Seven Heads in County Cork has been excluded from the route of the Wild Atlantic Way; if plans are in place to reverse this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29049/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions 1886 and 1895 together.

My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, such as the Wild Atlantic Way. This is an operational matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

Accordingly I have referred the question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

I can assure the Deputy that the Seven Heads Peninsula is a key component of the Wild Atlantic Way in West Cork. It is important to note that the Wild Atlantic Way is not simply a touring route but rather it is a means to guide and attract visitors, and all villages, businesses and geographic areas within close proximity of the route are in essence part of the geography of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Fáilte Ireland works with groups all along the coast and is more than happy to engage with interested parties in the Seven Heads peninsula to maximise the initiative's potential for the benefit of their community.

National Transport Authority Funding

1887. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funds provided and projects funded under the National Transport Authority's sustainable grants programme in 2016 in each of the seven greater Dublin area local authorities; the projects approved but not implemented in the Fingal local authority area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28891/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the administration of the *Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme*. This rolling programme of measures facilitates investment in various QBCs, cycling/walking, safety and traffic management projects throughout the seven local authority areas in the Greater Dublin Area, including Fingal County Council. Noting the NTA's responsibility for the STMG Programme, I have referred your question to the Authority for a more detailed reply in relation to the projects funded under the Programme in 2016. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Licences Applications

1888. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a driving licence will be issued to a person (details supplied) in view of serious delays. [28892/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. 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.

Park and Ride Facilities

1889. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to expand Irish Rail park and ride services in Sallins, County Kildare; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an increased demand for parking requirements by Irish Rail users in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28903/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the provision of Park and Ride facilities in County Kildare. Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1890. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the allocation of funds under the sports capital programme for a club (details supplied) will be determined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28963/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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 are being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Road Improvement Schemes

1891. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the budget that he allocated for Fintra bridge on the R263 in southwest Donegal; the timetable for the start of construction; the completion date for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29011/17]

1892. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for funding Tir Chonaill street bridge in Donegal town as sanctioned by his Department; the construction period for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29012/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1891 and 1892 together.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (including bridges) is the statutory responsibility of Donegal County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection, prioritisation and timeline for commencement and completion of construction of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

In May 2017, Donegal County Council applied to my Department for additional funding to progress work on two regional road bridges in County Donegal (Tirconnail Bridge in Donegal town and Fintra Bridge on the R263). The funding request consisted of a deck replacement and associated works for Tirconnail Bridge and the construction of a new replacement Fintra bridge

I have given approval to Donegal County Council to proceed with the replacement of Tirconnail bridge at a maximum cost of €700,000. Given the need to update the tender package and to go through the procurement process, I understand it will be year-end before construction can commence on this scheme. The timeline for completion of the works is a matter for the local authority.

In respect of the construction of a new replacement bridge at on the R263 at Fintra, Co. Donegal, my officials have confirmed that further engagement is required at engineering level between the Council and my Department regarding options for this bridge. A report is being sought from Donegal County Council which would set out further options taking account of the requirements of the applicable design standard (the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges). That process is continuing and no allocation can be confirmed in respect of that project until that process concludes. However, it should be noted that I, and my Department, are committed to the project.

Greenways Development

1893. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if

he has had engagement regarding the extension of a location (details supplied) in order that it be integrated with the Royal Canal greenway. [29026/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The development of the Royal Canal tow path as a greenway within the environs of Dublin city, along with any possible links to the towpath, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the relevant local authority. I have forwarded your correspondence to the NTA for consideration and direct reply to you. If you have not received a response within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Departmental Staff Data

1894. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff under the remit of his Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29046/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As individuals may apply direct to the Departments or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region that they wish to transfer to without the knowledge of their parent Department, my Department does not have the information requested by the Deputy. Such information will be available upon the introduction of the Civil Service Wide Mobility Scheme planned for later this year. Four staff from my Department transferred out of the Dublin region in the period in question – see table below. In each case the staff transferred to offices within my Department.

Year	No. of Transfers	Grade
2014	0	n/a
2015	1	Clerical Officer
2016	0	n/a
2017 (to date)	3	Clerical Officer, Station Officer + Ship Surveyor

There are no costs incurred for staff transferring outside of the Dublin region.

Question No. 1895 answered with Question No. 1886.

Youth Services Funding

1896. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding streams which are available or will become available to develop and deliver programmes in County Meath and elsewhere to ensure that there is proper supports for children that are not in school or full-time education; and the funding which is or will be available for the procurement or leasing of a premises in County Meath to allow for engagement with children and young persons outside of the school premises. [28661/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately

1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and in communities. I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. In 2017, an amount of €138,788 was allocated for the targeted youth projects and services in County Meath.

In addition the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla has advised that there are two School Completion Programmes (SCP) in County Meath namely Navan SCP and Trim South Meath SCP. The SCP supports enable children and young people at attend, participate and be retained in school and to actively support those out of school to return to school. The SCP will where necessary provide interim short-term supports to out of school students while they await a return to school or other education provision.

My Department recognises that it is always best for young people to remain in mainstream education. The provision of school and/or alternative education opportunities for out of school students is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with Education and Training Boards (ETBs provide such supports through the Youthreach and Community Training Centres). SCP funding may be used to rent suitable community space for the provision of short-term interventions to support out of school students when and only if such supports cannot be best implemented on school premises.

Detention Centres Data

1897. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the ratio of staff to detainees at Oberstown Juvenile Correction Centre; the number of recorded attacks on staff in tabular form, in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26684/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Based on information provided by Oberstown Children Detention Campus, I can confirm that the campus currently has 265 staff employed. Of these staff members, 182 are employed in front line work, working directly with young people. In relation to young people detained, Oberstown Children Detention Campus is licensed to accommodate up to 48 boys and 6 girls on campus. As of today, 9 June 2017, there are currently 37 children on campus.

Attached below is the recorded number of attacks on staff in 2015, 2016, and 2017 to date.

2017	2016	2015
Number of recorded attacks on Staff	Number of recorded attacks on Staff	Number of recorded attacks on Staff
9	45	42

A key priority for me is ensuring that Oberstown is safe and secure for both children and staff. In pursuit of this, a number of reviews have been conducted, including health and safety, operations, security and behaviour management. I have established an Implementation Group, which includes representatives from Oberstown staff and management, the Board of Management, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, a child development expert and also representatives of the IMPACT Trade Union. The Implementation Group is tasked with analysing the recommendations from the reviews and setting out the requirements and issues which require to be addressed to allow their implementation, as appropriate.

Child Safety

1898. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to safeguard and strengthen safety and protection policies for young disabled children travelling unsupervised on transport services to and from their homes to schools, hospitals, residential homes or other care facilities; if her Department has had liaison with existing transport providers in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26712/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): It is the policy position of this Government that everyone in society has a duty to keep children safe from harm, and that each Government Department is responsible for ensuring that services and initiatives under their remit adhere to best practice in child protection. In this regard, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which has oversight of transport providers, is responsible for ensuring that adequate children safeguarding arrangements operate within its sector.

The Children First Act 2015, which I am intending to commence in full by the end of the year, will place the following statutory obligations on providers of relevant services to children:

- To keep children safe from harm while they are availing of the service;
- To carry out a risk assessment to identify potential safeguarding risks which could arise while children are availing of the service, and,
- To develop a Child Safeguarding Statement that outlines the policies and procedures which are in place to mitigate the risks identified.

The types of organisation which will acquire these statutory obligations are set out in Schedule 1 of the Children First Act, but they include residential and health care services for children with disabilities and “any work or activity as a driver of, or as an assistant to the driver, or as a conductor, or as a supervisor of children using a vehicle which is being hired or used only for the purpose of conveying children who are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian.”

Counselling Services Provision

1899. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will reconsider the withdrawal of funding for school completion programmes counselling hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26766/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 1994 the Department of Social Welfare opened a grant scheme to provide counselling supports to children who had experienced bereavement or loss. This grant scheme then passed to the Family Support Agency (FSA) when it was established in 2003 and subsequently to Tusla on establishment in January 2014.

Up until 2011 applications were invited through an annual public advertisement, however in 2011 due to austerity this scheme was closed and no new applications have been accepted since 2011. Since 2011 the grantees who received funding in 2011 have continued to receive an annual grant equivalent to their 2011 grant. This Counselling Grants Scheme is for a total of €245,900 annually and currently there are only 64 grantees nationwide benefitting from this scheme. With over 4,000 schools in Ireland 64 grantees means that less than 2% of schools are in receipt of support from this scheme currently.

The Counselling Grants Scheme which was originally established to provide counselling

support for children affected by bereavement or loss was affected by austerity cuts in 2010. The need for bereavement and loss counselling still exists in schools right around the country however without a significantly increased budget it is unfair and unethical to continue providing support to a small number of areas (64 grantees) while excluding all other schools from the scheme. Opening up the scheme nationally with a current budget allocation of €245,000 is not an option as this equates to less than €60 per school. Hence the decision was made to cease the scheme in its current format.

Tusla Educational Welfare Services is very supportive of the provision of appropriate school counselling supports and the option of continuing the scheme with adequate funding to provide the opportunity to all schools and School Completion Programmes nationally. All School Completion Programmes have been requested to identify unmet needs as part of their annual plan for 2017/18. Responses identifying gaps in service, including counselling provision for bereavement and loss, are currently being reviewed by Tusla Educational Welfare Service.

Child Care Services Funding

1900. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if a late application for funding under the school age child care scheme will be accepted for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26853/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2017, I made €3 million in capital funding available for services providing school age childcare. The application process for this capital scheme has now closed. The initial deadline for applications of 5 May was extended to 17 May. In order to ensure transparency and fairness in relation to the application process, late applications cannot be accepted.

Brexit Negotiations

1901. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the threats identified by her Department with regard to the responsibilities of her Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26898/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last. Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these. In January of this year, I hosted a sectorial dialogue with children, young people and key stakeholders in Croke Park at which

the views of all interested parties were captured. Since then, the Advisory Council to *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures; the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020* has considered the report of the event and work is ongoing in relation to the more detailed implications of Brexit. Furthermore, matters in relation to Brexit were discussed by over 100 children and young people in April of this year as part of the annual regional Comhairle na nÓg Networking events. This has enabled my Department to table those issues which may impact on children and young people, post-Brexit, and indeed identify those issues which resonate most strongly with our youngest citizens. However, it must be stated that such matters are subsets of much larger items which will be considered, in the main, in conjunction with colleagues in the Departments of Finance, Justice and Equality, Education and Health as part of the wider negotiating process.

Public Sector Pensions Data

1902. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if she will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of her Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26967/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested is not routinely collected or held by my Department. Details of such deductions are an operational matter for each agency under the remit of my Department and I have requested each agency to respond directly to the Deputy in the matter.

Child Poverty

1903. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps her Department is taking to reduce child poverty. [27005/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In recognition of the higher risks and life-long consequences of child poverty, the Government set a child-specific poverty target in *Better Outcomes, Better Future: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* to reduce consistent child poverty by at least two-thirds by 2020. This figure currently represents 102,000 children.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a whole of government policy framework, which requires all Departments and Agencies to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, which I chair, has responsibility for whole of government implementation, and includes representatives from all government Departments and Agencies.

The Department of Social Protection has the lead role in coordinating government strategies on child poverty. It also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and has identified child poverty as a key cross-sectoral priority to be addressed.

Officials in my Department are working closely with the Department of Social Protection in informing the development of this cross-sectoral priority.

Officials in the Department of Social Protection have co-convened a subgroup with members of the Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to progress solutions to

child poverty.

In recognition of the fact that child poverty is a multifaceted problem, this group also includes officials from other Departments, including the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Skills.

Led by the Department of Social Protection, this group has developed a paper which outlines a whole of government approach to tackling child poverty. This is based around the three pillars outlined in the EU Recommendation on Investing in Children:

- Access to adequate resources
- Access to affordable quality services
- Children's right to participate.

This paper covers issues relating to my Department, such as childcare, prevention and early intervention and family support, as well as issues in other Departments, such as healthcare inequalities, DEIS schools, and income supports.

The Advisory Council for Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, supported by my Department, is arranging a roundtable event to discuss this paper and progress a whole of Government approach to child poverty. This will include high level officials from key Departments and Agencies, as well as academics and representatives from the NGO sector.

My Department is also developing a Single Affordable Childcare Scheme to provide families with good quality childcare at a cost they can afford. Budget 2017 provided additional funding for the scheme's development and initial roll-out, to include both a targeted and a universal element. Subsidies will be available for children aged from 6 months up to 15 years and will meet families' full-time and part-time childcare needs, including outside of school hours and during school holiday time. The highest levels of subsidy will be provided to those on low incomes, helping families to overcome disadvantage and contribute to a reduction in child poverty.

My Department has also established a Children's Equality Commission to ensure that the voices of children who experience or understand economic hardship or poverty are directly heard and acted on by policymakers. The Commission will be comprised of Child Commissioners and Adult Commissioners. The Child Commissioners are children who experience or have an understanding of economic hardship or poverty. The Adult Commissioners will be senior policy makers from Government Departments, Stage agencies and other bodies relevant to the issues raised by children.

Consultations with relevant children and young people have been ongoing for some months, and the launch of the Dublin phase of the Commission will include the findings from the work with the children and young people and the commitments to be made by policy makers and is expected to take place in the coming weeks.

Children in Care

1904. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason for Tusla's policy with regard to placing children under 12 years of age in residential care. [27076/17]

1905. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the num-

ber of children in residential care in 2016 and to date in 2017, by age and county. [27077/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1904 and 1905 together.

My Department's policy is that children aged 12 and under are only placed in a residential setting if it is part of their care plan, and for the shortest time possible. Children should not be placed in residential care due to a shortage of suitable foster care places. Each child is assessed and the decision about where to place them is based on their needs, which are identified through the care planning process.

The latest figures from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, indicates that, at the end of March 2017, there were 6,308 children in care. Of these, 362 (6%) were in a residential placement, 210 of which were private residential placements.

A child is placed in a residential setting only when they have an identified need that can be met by this service or for an intensive assessment or provision of specialist services. In general, these centres are based in domestic style homes in the community, and staffed by social care workers to attend to the needs of the child. Specialist supports are also made available, as needed, and many centres have specialist skillsets and therapeutic modalities.

I have asked Tusla to provide the Deputy with figures on the number of children in residential care in 2016 and to date in 2017.

Foster Care Expenditure

1906. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average cost of care for a child in private foster care as compared to those registered with Tusla. [27078/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can advise the Deputy that the cost of statutory Foster Care Allowance is €325 per week for a child under 12 and €352 per week for a child over 12. Tusla has informed me that the average cost of non-statutory foster care is €1,000 per week which is paid to the non-statutory foster care agency. This sum includes the costs associated with the employment of the link social worker, administration, insurance, recruitment, employment and training of social workers and other professionals, reviews and support provided by the foster care agency to the foster carers.

Child Support Payments

1907. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to support stay-at-home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27093/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the provision of childcare options for families that respect parental choice and reflect international evidence on how to attain the best outcomes for children.

I support the Government's extension of parental leave for parents; particularly in the crucial first year. The Government has provided additional support for stay-at-home parents through the home carer tax credit, which has been increased to €1,100 per year. I support an increase in the earnings threshold for this, and have raised this with the Minister for Finance.

Delivering more affordable childcare is only one element of a broader set of commitments and supports aimed at parents and children. The provision of improved services for centre-based care is very important, but I will not lose sight of the needs of children who do not attend them. In this regard, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. The intention is to deliver a cross-cutting strategy which will take a joined-up, whole of Government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years (0-6 years). The drafting of the National Early Years Strategy is being advanced. In December I hosted an Open Policy Debate on the Strategy with a view to completion of the Strategy later this year.

Child Care Services Provision

1908. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she will take to increase the number of registered child minders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27094/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have established a working group in order to make short, medium and long-term recommendations on reforms for the child minding sector. The working group is chaired by Child minding Ireland and includes officials from Tusla and DCYA.

The working group's recommendations will relate to child minders who are currently exempt from registration with Tusla (i.e. those minding three or fewer pre-school children, or those minding school-age children only). The working group will only be making recommendations in relation to home-based childminders involved in non-relative care. It is my understanding that the Group is finalising their recommendations at present and when they submit them to me, my officials will then consider the next steps in relation to supporting childminders to move towards registration and eventual participation in the delivery of subsidised childcare to parents.

Disability Act Employment Targets

1909. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in her Department and in each State and semi-State body under the aegis of her Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition relating to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27132/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department operates in accordance with the Disability Act 2005 and the Code of Practice for the Employment of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service to promote, support and annually report on its employment of persons with disabilities.

Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies:

- to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities;
- to comply with the statutory Code of Practice;

- to meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities;
- to report each year on the achievement of these obligations.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) reports on compliance with the 3% target. In its latest published report, for the calendar year 2015, the NDA reported as follows in relation to my Department and the agencies under its aegis:

Department/Agencies	% age of employees with disabilities
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	7.1%
Child and Family Agency (TUSLA)	1.2%
Oberstown Children Detention Campus	1.6%
Adoption Authority of Ireland	18.2%
Ombudsman for Children's Office	0%

Direct recruitment to my Department is conducted through the Public Appointments Service (PAS), which operates a policy of equality of opportunity and selection on merit by means of fair and open competition in accordance with the Codes of Practice published by the Commission for Public Service Appointments. Recruitment to the agencies under the aegis of my Department is done either through PAS or on an equal opportunities basis.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) 2015 - 2024 was launched by the Government on 2 October 2015. The Government has already taken a number of key decisions as recommended in the Strategy:

- The public service employment target for people with disabilities will be increased on a phased basis from 3% to 6%;
- Special public service competitions for people with disabilities will be arranged and alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities will be opened up.

Youth Services Funding

1910. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of mainstream funding from her Department and other Government Departments that is invested in youth programmes in the north County Dublin area; the projects that are being funded through this expenditure; the allocation for each; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27176/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

In 2017, an amount of €319,998 was allocated for the projects and services in North County Dublin. Balbriggan Youth Service has been allocated €86,803 while Swords/Baldoyle Youth

Service has been allocated €233,195.

School Completion Programme

1911. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has read the ESRI review of the school completion programme; if her attention has been drawn to its findings regarding the effects of significant funding shortfalls making local groups unable to provide targeted interventions such as the provision of summer programmes for at-risk children; her views on whether the continued under-funding of the SCP by her Department is inconsistent with the ambition as stated in the programme for a partnership Government (details supplied); and her further views on whether her Department's and Tusla's lack of interest in the school completion programme is an indication that they do not consider the improvement of participation and retention of children in school integral to their core mandate. [27189/17]

1912. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 605 of 16 May 2017, the way in which without data on a post-code or electoral district level the public and the Houses of the Oireachtas can be expected to evaluate the effects of the budget reductions that have taken place to the school completion programme and home school liaison programme since 2012 and in which the ESRI review of the programmes identified significant negative impacts on local provision of interventions; her views on whether staff time would be well spent in collating this data at this level in order to assess whether the impact of budget reductions identified by the qualitative ESRI review is widespread across different areas; and her further views on whether the reluctance of Tusla to compile this data indicates that it does not consider the improvement of participation and retention of children in school integral to its core mandate. [27190/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1911 and 1912 together.

I am advised by Tusla that the allocation of resources to the School Completion Programme (SCP) and Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Programme is not linked to either post-code or electoral areas rather it is linked to schools based on the needs of the cohort of children attending each school.

Currently schools provide school based data which allows Tusla to compile county level reports for the Annual School Attendance Report. The two pieces of data schools are obliged to provide are details of children missing over 20 school days and aggregate school absences per school year. As children do not always attend school in their local or electoral area it would require every school in the country to report all students' attendances with their postcode in order to generate comprehensive electoral area school attendance figures.

The majority of schools in the SCP programme are included as they were identified for extra supports under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme which is managed by the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

Annual data regarding school attendance at county level is published by Tusla in the Annual School Attendance Reports which are available online at www.tusla.ie

The Department of Education and Skills publish annual retention reports for DEIS schools www.education.ie and these reports demonstrate that school completion rates in DEIS schools have improved at a rate faster than other schools since 2012 which indicate that the interventions to support attendance, participation and retention including SCP and HSCL are making positive impacts.

The DEIS 2017 review also indicates that overall the suite of supports offered through DEIS have generated positive outcomes.

The SCP currently receives €24.7 million in annual funding which is used to support 124 local projects at an average of €200,000 per project. In line with all public services, the SCP was subject to cuts during the period of austerity. However since the SCP has come under the remit of Tusla in 2014 funding for the initiative has not been cut. Tusla has committed significant resources to addressing the many recommendations in the ESRI Report to which the Deputy refers and when these recommendations are fully addressed, including the key areas of governance and employment, the matter of the funding of the SCP can be reviewed, particularly in the context of the recent review of the DEIS Programme.

The following are the actions undertaken by Tusla in response to the ESRI recommendations:

- All SCP staff have received 4 days of Continuous Professional Development in the last year with 2 further days planned for autumn 2017.

- Graphite Human Resource Company has been contracted to provide day to day Industrial Relations and Human Resources support to all 124 SCP Local Management Committees (LMCs)

- The Wheel has provided a series of Governance workshops and webinars to support LMCs.

- The SCP Retention Planning Template has been improved to assist with planning at local level.

- An employment audit was completed and this reflects the concerns raised by the ESRI report in relation to employment practices across some LMCs.

- SCP funding has remained constant since SCP came into Tusla.

- The number of HSCL Coordinators will increase from 400 to 419 from September 2017 as a result of the DEIS review bringing further schools into the DEIS support programme.

- SCP coordinators and project workers have been actively involved in all developments and have contributed positively to the CPD and Retention planning template.

- Work is ongoing on the development of a new Governance and employment model for SCP.

I have been assured that Tusla is fully committed to the School Completion Programme and will strive to ensure that the SCP is in a position to deliver consistent high quality provision nationally.

Child Abuse

1913. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the criteria by which historical cases of child abuse are assigned as high priority, medium priority and low priority, respectively. [27191/17]

1914. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of historical cases of child abuse that are assigned as high priority, medium priority and low priority, respectively. [27192/17]

1915. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff on the specialist teams assigned to historical cases of child sexual abuse; and if this is their full-time role. [27193/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1913 to 1915, inclusive, together.

A historical or retrospective disclosure is where an adult discloses abuse experienced in childhood. I understand that the overwhelming majority of such disclosures are about sexual abuse. Tusla has informed me that a case is categorised as high priority if any of the following criteria apply: the alleged perpetrator has a conviction for sexual abuse or assault against child/young adult; the alleged perpetrator is residing with children/young adults; the alleged perpetrator is employed to work with children/young adults or involved with voluntary or community based activities; the alleged perpetrator makes an admission of abuse or if the disclosure refers to organised or ritual abuse.

A case is categorised as medium priority if it is not yet established if the alleged perpetrator has contact with children or young people or where a parent is already aware of potential concern and is acting appropriately and a safety plan is in place.

A case is categorised as low priority if it has been established that the alleged perpetrator does not have contact with children or young people, or there is no information to indicate that the alleged perpetrator has contact with children or young people.

Tusla has advised me that there were 1,895 historical/retrospective cases on hand at the end of March 2017. All of these referrals have been reviewed by a social worker and 551 were categorised as high priority, 943 were medium priority and 401 low priority.

I can advise the Deputy that the management of all referrals including retrospective/historical cases occurs at Area level. Each retrospective case referred to Tusla is screened by the Area Duty Team who will initially establish if there are any known child protection concerns and the Area will respond thereafter, as appropriate, to the referral. Tusla has advised me that a service improvement plan has been put in place to deal with these outstanding cases. In the first instance, specialist teams are working on high priority cases. Medium and low priority cases are assessed by social workers who are drawn from non-child protection teams, on a project basis, to deal with this work. They are provided with training and supervision.

I have asked Tusla to provide information on the number of staff on specialist teams assigned to historical cases of child sexual abuse and will revert to the Deputy when the reply is received.

School Expulsions

1916. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of expulsions from and the number of students enrolled in each secondary school in County Wexford in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [27195/17]

1917. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of suspensions from each secondary school in County Wexford in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [27196/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1916 and 1917 together.

Questions - Written Answers

The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table. Tusla does not receive enrolment numbers from individual schools.

The individual schools are not named for data protection purposes.

Number of Expulsions and Suspensions in all Post Primary Schools in Wexford.

Individual schools are identified by letter.

2014/2015 School Year

School Name	Number of Expulsions	Number of Suspensions
A	2	66
B	0	10
C	0	14
D	0	42
E	0	13
F	0	6
G	1	40
H	2	68
I	0	17
J	2	26
K	0	108
L	0	25
M	0	0
N	0	5
O	0	0
P	0	12
Q	0	93
R	1	25
S	0	22
T	0	2
U	1	8
V	0	38

2015/2016 School Year

School Name	Number of Expulsions	Number of Suspensions
A	2	57
B	1	21
C	3	23
D	0	23
E	0	12
F	0	13
G	0	61
H	0	82
I	0	23

School Name	Number of Expulsions	Number of Suspensions
J	0	30
K	0	93
L	0	19
M	0	0
N	0	4
O	0	1
P	0	16
Q	0	20
R	1	66
S	0	20
T	0	0
U	0	25
V	0	28

The following table presents data submitted to date during the 2016/2017 academic year.

School Name	Number of Expulsions	Number of Suspensions
A	0	49
B	0	0
C	0	0
D	0	0
E	0	11
F	0	0
G	0	46
H	0	30
I	0	0
J	0	0
K	0	38
L	1	40
M	0	0
N	0	0
O	0	0
P	0	0
Q	0	20
R	0	17
S	0	28
T	0	0
U	0	0
V	0	0

School Expulsions

1918. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average number of suspensions and expulsions from secondary schools in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [27197/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table.

Average number of Suspensions and Expulsions in all Schools:
2014/2015
Suspensions: 3.5
Expulsions: 0.03
2015/2016
Suspensions: 4
Expulsions: 0.05
2016/2017 to date (09/06/17)
Suspensions: 1
Expulsions: 0.01

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

1919. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of extending the ECCE scheme to 48 weeks. [27210/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The cost of extending the ECCE programme to 48 weeks at present rates would be €87m per year. It should be noted that this question only addresses the financial aspect of such increases. Any such changes would require revision of rules around eligibility and enrolment dates and would need to look at issues of capacity with regard to physical space, staffing capacities and other associated matters.

The actual cost of this proposal would be subject to a number of factors including actual levels of participation, and the number of children subvented at the 'higher capitation' rate - costs increase as the number of higher qualified staff increase.

Commencement of Legislation

1920. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the Children First Act 2015 will be fully commenced; the planning which has been carried out to date in 2017 to ensure its provisions are fully implemented and resourced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27295/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Since the Children First Act 2015 was signed into law on 19 November 2015, a number of provisions of the Act have already been commenced as follows:

(i) Sections 1 to 5 (Part I) and section 28 (Part V) of the Act were commenced on 10 December 2015. Sections 1 to 5 are standard provisions in relation to title, citation, regulations, definitions etc. Section 28 relates to corporal punishment and removes the common law defence of reasonable chastisement in relation to same.

(ii) Section 18 (Part III) and Sections 20-26 (Part IV) were commenced on 1 May 2016. Section 18 of the Act is a technical amendment to ensure that the Child and Family Agency is a specified body for purposes of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012. Sections 20-26 deal with establishing the Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group (CFIDIG) on a statutory basis and expanding the Group to include all Govern-

ment Departments.

As the Act imposes obligations on certain individuals working with children and on relevant service providers, I think it is vital that all individuals and sectors are fully prepared and ready to implement the legislation before it is commenced. Therefore, in relation to those provisions of the Act which have not yet been commenced, I have signed off on a proposal for phased and structured preparations for implementation which will allow for full commencement of the Act by December, 2017. These provisions include those related to mandated reporting of child abuse, mandated assisting and the preparation of Child Safeguarding Statements by organisations providing relevant services to children.

The phased implementation timetable will also allow Tusla to undertake the significant preparatory work required to enable it to fully meet its obligations under the legislation. This will include ensuring that the appropriate internal systems are in place to deal with the intake of mandatory reports by Tusla and that a suite of resources is available to support and assist all sectors in implementing the legislation. My Department is working closely with Tusla in relation to making available basic Children First training, information and resource materials.

In the meantime, my Department will continue to work closely with the Statutory Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group, which includes Tusla, an Garda Síochána and the HSE, who will take a key role in ensuring that all necessary preparations and supports are in place for those who will acquire legal obligations under the Act.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

1921. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her Department's estimated hourly running cost for the early childhood care and education scheme and the hourly running cost of early years care for those under three years of age in services for both cohorts of children. [27385/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The capitation rates paid by my Department for the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme are €64.50 per week for the standard capitation and €75 per week for the higher capitation. These payments provide for 15 hours per week of early childhood care and education. The hourly running costs for the Programme are therefore €4.30 per hour at standard rate and €5 per hour at higher rate.

The hourly running costs of early years services were estimated as part of the preparation of the 2016 policy paper on the Affordable Childcare Scheme. These estimates were prepared on the basis of the data available at that time. It was estimated that the average hourly running cost was €4.67 per child per hour. Given the variation in required adult-child ratios by the age of the child, this figure translated into estimated hourly running costs of €4.76 per hour for 2 year olds, €5.37 per hour for 1 year olds, and €7.81 per hour for children less than 1 year old. Running costs for children over 3 years old were estimated to be lower.

The policy paper noted that these hourly running costs differ from the implicit hourly cost of the ECCE Programme as the ECCE capitation rates reflect the different adult-child ratio (1:11) permitted for sessional pre-school services as well as the incentivisation of graduate employment within the ECCE Programme.

My Department will shortly be commissioning an independent review of the cost of delivering quality childcare, which will provide up-to-date and more comprehensive information in relation to the costs of delivering early years care and education.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

1922. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of the early childhood care and education scheme over a 48 week period at a higher amount of €12 for both higher and lower capitation rates. [27386/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The total cost for a calendar year for increasing both the lower and higher capitation rates for ECCE would be €427m which is an increase of €150m. It should be noted that this question only addresses the financial aspect of such increases. Any changes would also require revision of the rules around eligibility and enrolment dates and would also need to look at issues of capacity with regard to physical space, staffing capacities and other associated matters.

It should be noted that the actual cost of this proposal would be subject to a number of factors including actual levels of participation, and the number of children subvented at the 'higher capitation' rate- costs increase as the number of higher qualified staff increase.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

1923. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated cost of introducing a capitation rate of €12 to early years services for all babies under three years of age over a 48 week period. [27387/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that an extension to the existing CCS scheme being introduced in September this year will see a payment of up to €20.00 per week per child being introduced over a 52 week period. It is anticipated that some 33,000 children may benefit from this new measure.

In the event of full uptake of this new measure the annual cost will be €34.32m. The equivalent cost of the measure as set out by the Deputy would be €19.01m per annum

Early Childhood Care and Education Data

1924. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children availing of the targeted subsidy within the ACS aged between six months and three years of age by amount (details supplied). [27438/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) which will commence at the earliest possible date, will include both universal and targeted elements. It is currently estimated that when the scheme is initially introduced approximately 16,000 children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age will benefit from targeted subsidies within the ACS.

Of the total number of children who benefit from targeted subsidies within the ACS, it is estimated that approximately 21% will benefit from the maximum subsidy rates available within the scheme, which will be awarded to families with net incomes below €22,700 per annum. The maximum subsidy rates will vary by the age of the child, and will range from €5.11 per hour for children less than 1 year old to €3.76 per hour for school-age children. The maximum subsidy available for any child under the scheme will be €5.11 per hour. The minimum subsidy under the targeted portion of the scheme for children aged between 6 months and 3 years will be

€0.50 per hour. This minimum subsidy-rate will apply to families with a net income of €47,500 per annum.

As the tapers that will be applied to the subsidy rate (for families with incomes between the ACS base and maximum income thresholds) will be smooth, and will not take the form of subsidy bands, it is not possible to identify the number who may benefit from a specific amount of subsidy that lies between the minimum and maximum levels.

On 11 April, I made an announcement that since the ACS would not commence this September a range of measures will be introduced by my Department to make childcare more affordable for thousands of families throughout Ireland. I can confirm that the following measures will commence this September;

- A new universal subsidy will be available for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age (or until they are eligible for ECCE e.g. 3 years 3 months) in registered childcare. This will amount to as much as €80 a month or €1,000 per year for children in full time childcare.

- Subsidies provided under existing childcare schemes, specifically the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes will be increased significantly, in some cases by as much as 50%. To illustrate the effect of this increase, the highest subsidy provided under the CCS scheme for full time childcare in 2016 was €95 per week. This will increase to €145 per week from September. This should decrease the co-payment required by families who qualify and therefore make childcare more accessible and affordable to these families; assisting them in their return to training and employment and lifting them out of poverty.

A dedicated website (<http://affordablechildcare.ie/>) was launched at the end of May with information for parents to inform them of the various enhanced childcare supports they may qualify for this September. This site has already amassed nearly 100,000 page views from over 26,000 users nationwide as well as internationally. Nearly 80% of these are new users to the website. The majority of these hits (over 50%) have come directly to the site with over 25% coming from social media sharing. A campaign via various media, including digital and radio, is underway which will also raise awareness among parents. Finally, my Department is hosting information events for childcare providers throughout the country over the month of June in preparation for the changes coming in September.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

1925. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the full year cost of the targeted portion of the ACS in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. [27439/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The full-year cost of the targeted schemes (Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Scheme) was €61 million in 2015, and €58 million in 2016.

For 2017 an additional budget of €19 million was secured, to provide for both a new universal subsidy and increased targeted subsidies through the introduction of the ACS. While the start-date for the ACS has been delayed and the scheme will not start in September 2017, the new universal subsidy and the increased targeted subsidies will be introduced in September through the existing childcare schemes (CCS and TEC). Of this additional funding, approximately €7 million is expected to be spent on the universal subsidy from September.

The ACS will commence at the earliest possible date. It is estimated that the full-year cost of the ACS will be approximately €150 million, of which it is estimated that the targeted portion of the scheme will account for approximately €132 million.

Departmental Contracts

1926. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by her Department or any agency or body under the aegis of her Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27447/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department did not enter into any contractual arrangements with the company mentioned by the Deputy. Use of that particular company by any of the bodies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter and I have requested each agency to respond directly to the Deputy in the matter.

Child and Family Agency Remit

1927. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether legislation is required to give Tusla a statutory duty to protect the welfare of children living in emergency accommodation, especially in hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation. [27464/17]

1928. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will request Tusla to develop statutory or non-statutory guidelines in respect of the length of time that households with children can be permitted to be temporarily housed by local authorities in hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation; and if not, the reason she is of the view these are not required. [27465/17]

1930. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether legislation is needed that would place a statutory obligation on Tusla to put measures in place that explicitly promote the welfare of children living in emergency homeless accommodation and require the agency to put in place in-reach teams to facilitate children's access to education and social services and to be tasked with the improvement of child welfare; and if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Tusla has no obligation in this regard and it is most frequently left to approved housing bodies to provide social support services to families living in emergency accommodation. [27467/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1927, 1928 and 1930 together.

Tusla, under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 and the Child Care Act 1991 has a statutory obligation to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, including providing for the protection and care of children in circumstances where their parents have not given, or are unlikely to be able to give, adequate protection and care. This obligation applies to all children in the State - regardless of their accommodation status.

It is important to note that Tusla only intervenes in family life in exceptional circumstances. Children who are with their families in emergency accommodation remain in the care of their parents or guardians. A child, irrespective of accommodation status, who comes to the atten-

tion of Tusla will, where the appropriate threshold has been reached, have an assessment carried out by a social worker. Where Tusla has concerns regarding the welfare and development of a child, due to parenting difficulties or adverse environmental factors, they will provide family supports to assist the family and child. Ongoing monitoring will form part of the response by Tusla where it is required. In addition, referrals to other services e.g. mental health services, will be made where appropriate.

As part of a whole-Government approach to homelessness, my Department is working closely with Tusla to provide supports for families in emergency accommodation in order to mitigate the challenges faced by parents and children in this situation. Of course, while Tusla has a role to play in this, it is not for that agency to determine by guidance or otherwise how long a family should be provided with emergency accommodation. Such matters are the statutory responsibility of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Local Authorities.

As the Deputy is aware, Tusla has agreed a joint protocol with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE). This covers child welfare and protection matters for children in emergency accommodation. It is fully operational in the DRHE areas and it is intended to extend it to Galway, Limerick and Cork this year. Enhanced National Quality Standards for Homeless Services, including a child welfare component, are currently being developed by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive on behalf of all local authorities. A national advisory group has been in place since 2014 with representation from non-governmental homelessness service providers, the Health Service Executive, Tusla and others, as well as the housing authorities. Draft standards were piloted in services in four of the nine homeless regions during 2016 and it is expected that they will be implemented nationally in the coming months. This will, over time, enhance the quality of homeless service provision.

Tusla also funds child support workers and has appointed a Homelessness Liaison Officer. My Department is providing free childcare for homeless children in the Dublin area for up to 25 hours a week. The Family Resource Centres are working with people who are experiencing homelessness and many have already developed local responses to the needs of families in emergency accommodation. These include, by way of example, family fun days, homework support, after school programmes, play therapy and transport services. Tusla will be developing a reporting mechanism this year to record the extent of homeless work in the Family Resource Centres.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with homelessness and school attendance, the Educational Welfare Office offers a number of supports to children and their families. The DRHE has also arranged Leap cards for homeless families in Dublin to facilitate family days out and for school journeys.

Ultimately, my concern is that we minimise and then eliminate the problem of homelessness. In the meantime, I will continue to support measures to help those affected, to the greatest degree possible within my area of responsibility.

Child and Family Agency Remit

1929. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla collects performance statistics on each local authority recording the length of time children are being housed in emergency accommodation, each household's access to an in-reach team that facilitates children's access to education and social services and the household's access to persons tasked with the improvement of child welfare; and if not, the reason therefor. [27466/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As these are operational matters, I have asked Tusla – The Child and Family Agency to respond directly to the Deputy with the most up-to-date information.

Question No. 1930 answered with Question No. 1927.

Child Care Services Funding

1931. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the budgetary arrangement which has been made for vulnerable one to three year olds in community early years services for 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27685/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In the first instance I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that an extension to the existing CCS scheme being introduced in September this year will see a payment of €20.00 per week per child being introduced over a 52 week period. It is anticipated that some 33,000 children may benefit from this new measure.

Further, I am aware that the 0-3 age group presents particular issues for early years service providers. In an effort to better understand the range of issues being faced I have asked a subgroup of the Early Years Forum to examine the evidence in this regard and to consider appropriate measures to alleviate any identified sustainability issues. This group has met on a number of occasions and is due to report back to me and the Early Years Forum in the coming weeks. It is my intention that the outcome of the group's work will inform my Department's consideration of the forthcoming Estimates and budgetary process for 2018 as necessary.

Departmental Expenditure

1932. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount her Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27704/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department did not enter into any contractual arrangements with the company for the provision of services. Use of that particular company by any of the bodies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter and I have requested each agency to respond directly to the Deputy in the matter.

Departmental Functions

1933. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if assistance will be provided to a person (detail supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27828/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have arranged for an official of my Department to contact the Deputy in order to ascertain what assistance can be afforded to the individual concerned.

Appointments to State Boards

1934. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if any former Deputies have been appointed to State boards under her remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28210/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform that Deputy that no former TDs have been appointed to State Boards under the remit of my Department under the Government Guidelines that involve the Public Appointments Service. I should point out that I, not the Public Appointments Service, appoint the members to these State Boards.

Child Care Costs

1935. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the fact that child care providers are increasing prices before the introduction of the affordable childcare scheme; if measures can be put in place to prevent same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27943/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am not anticipating widespread increases in childcare fees as a result of increases in subsidies this September. There is no evidence, at this point, of plans to increase fee-levels. Fees charged to parents are entirely at the discretion of childcare providers who operate independently of the State. There are many factors that influence the fees charged, including a range of cost pressures and market forces. A childcare provider may raise its fees for one of many reasons, particularly where childcare fees have changed very little in recent years. While I do not expect a widespread increase in fees, my Department will actively monitor the trends over time. The policy paper on the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS), which the Government approved last October, examined the option of imposing price-caps on childcare providers to prevent erosion of subsidies through fee-inflation. The policy paper noted the potential benefits of price-caps, including preventing fee-inflation and providing certainty for parents, and equity between parents. It did however note the problems that might arise. Introduction of price-caps would represent economic regulation of the market, raising legal and economic questions as to what constitutes a fair price for childcare. The policy paper recommended that there should be no initial price-cap, but that the option of price-caps should be considered following the Independent Review of Costs and examination of the initial market response to higher subsidies. The Independent Review, which will be commissioned later this year, will include examination of variation in costs and fees. It will be a key input into any future consideration of the potential benefits and risks of introducing price-caps. Estimates of take-up of September 2017 measures suggest that up to 70,000 children will benefit from the improvements I am making. The fact that so many children will benefit from subsidies this September is a very positive development and represents a significant precursor to the Affordable Childcare Scheme when even more families will benefit.

Child and Family Agency

1936. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a reply will issue from Tusla to correspondence from a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27995/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in relation to this matter. I will revert

to the Deputy once I have been furnished with a response by Tusla.

Postal Codes

1937. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount spent by her Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28134/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The use of the Eircode location code did not necessitate any upgrade to my Department's information technology systems or databases and as such, no costs were incurred in relation to its application.

The Eircode location code is featured on all Departmental business cards and headed stationery printed since the introduction of the Eircode system and does not incur any cost in addition to the reprinting costs. Staff are also encouraged to include the Eircode location code in all email signatures.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

1938. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the first and full year cost of extending childcare subsidies to band A recipients under the 2017 childcare measures. [28222/17]

1939. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the first and full year cost of extending childcare subsidies to band AJ recipients under the 2017 childcare measures. [28223/17]

1940. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the first and full year cost of extending childcare subsidies to band B recipients under the 2017 childcare measures. [28224/17]

1941. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the first and full year cost of extending childcare subsidies to band C recipients under the 2017 childcare measures. [28225/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1938 to 1941, inclusive, together.

In PQ 28225/17 there is a reference to Band C and in context I presume the Deputy is referring to the new Band D (Band C is a historical administrative band, which is no longer used).

It is estimated that the full-year cost of extending childcare subsidy rates for Band A, Band AJ and Band B beneficiaries of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme, in addition to a new Band D being created in respect of children who are entitled to hold the over 6 GP Visit Card, and a new universal payment (for children who are between the ages of 6 months until the age they qualify for entry into the ECCE scheme), would be approximately €110 million.

Breakdown of the Estimated Cost Per Band

Bands	Amount
Band A	€60 million
Band AJ	€12 million

Bands	Amount
Band B	€12 million
Band D	€6 million
Universal Subsidy	€20 million

Child Care Services Funding

1942. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a decision will be made on an application for capital funding by a childcare facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28245/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 20th March 2017 I announced the Early Years Capital programme for 2017 in three strands, as follows:

- Strand 1: Additional Places (€3 million total available – maximum €50,000 per grant);
- Strand 2: Building improvements and maintenance/refurbishment (€500,000 total available, maximum €20,000 per grant, Community childcare services only);
- Strand 3: Natural outdoor play area (€500,000 total available, maximum €5,000 per grant).

The closing date for receipt of applications under this programme was Thursday 27th April and I can confirm that an application was received from the service referred to by the Deputy under strand 2 of this programme. Applications received under this programme are currently being evaluated by Pobal. It is anticipated that Pobal will be issuing recommendations on funding under this programme to my Department over the coming weeks.

Student Support Schemes

1943. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the arrangements which are made regarding providing specific subsidised childcare for adult students that are being supported by SUSI educational grants as their only source of income and which brings childcare costs of up to €1,000 per month out of their reach; the initiatives which are being considered for rollout of bespoke assistance; the way in which she has envisaged assisting this cohort of childcare usage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28436/17]

1944. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the arrangements which are made regarding providing specific subsidised childcare for students being supported by SUSI grants as their only source of income; the initiatives being considered for a rollout of additional assistance to cover the costs of childcare for this marginalised group; the way in which she has envisaged assisting this cohort of childcare users that is facilitated by EU funds to cover the cost of this childcare provision in other member states; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28437/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1943 and 1944 together.

Currently SUSI grants do not give rise to eligibility for subsidised childcare other than through the ECCE free pre-school programme, although some recipients of SUSI grants may be eligible for subsidised childcare on other grounds. For example, if a SUSI grant-recipient also has a Medical Card or a GP Visit Card, then the SUSI grant-recipient may be eligible for childcare subsidised through the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) scheme. In addition,

the ECCE free pre-school programme is a universal programme that provides 15 hours of free early care and education for 38 weeks per year for children aged between 3 and school-entry, regardless of parental income.

As from September 2017, a new universal subsidy for childcare is being introduced for children aged between 6 months and 36 months, or until qualification for the ECCE free pre-school programme if that is later than 36 months. As this new subsidy is universal, it will be available to SUSI grant-recipients who are not already in receipt of a CCS childcare subsidy. Provided the child is within the specified age-range, a subsidy of up to €20 per week will be available in any Tusla-registered childcare provider, for up to 52 weeks per year.

In addition, at the earliest possible date the existing targeted childcare schemes will be replaced by the Affordable Childcare Scheme. When it is introduced, the Affordable Childcare Scheme will change the basis of eligibility for subsidised childcare. Rather than eligibility being based on possession of a Medical Card (or GP Visit Card) or receipt of a relevant social welfare payment or participation in a designated training course, eligibility will then be based on family income. A student in a family where the only source of income is a SUSI grant will then be eligible on income-grounds for a childcare subsidy.

Child Care Services

1945. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the affordable childcare scheme will be implemented; the reason for the delay; if registered child minders can be paid retrospectively in view of the fact that they have been carrying out best practice for some time and will be doing the work which they will ultimately be paid for under the scheme when it comes into being; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28545/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) has been designed to facilitate the inclusion of childminders. However, it is essential that public subsidies are only provided to childcare providers where there is a sufficient level of assurance of the quality of provision. For this reason, the ACS, once underway, will be delivered through Tusla-registered childcare providers, both centre-based providers and childminders.

I do not want to delay the benefit of higher childcare subsidies for low-income families. For that reason, I recently announced that a number of changes will be made to existing childcare schemes that will bring substantial benefits to tens of thousands of children and their families from this September. These changes will include a new universal subsidy for children aged from 6 months up to 36 months old (or commencement of the free pre-school programme) and significant increases of up to 50 per cent in targeted childcare subvention rates provided under the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Scheme for children aged from 6 months up to 15 years old. For example, parents availing of full-time childcare who currently have their childcare costs subsidised by €95 per week under the CCS Scheme – which is the largest of the targeted childcare schemes – will see their subvention rate rise to €145 per week from this September.

These childcare supports will become available to families from this September through childcare services contracted through my Department. It is not envisaged that any payment will be made retrospectively, however a non-contact payment in recognition of administration associated with the new measures will be paid this year to all childcare providers who sign up to deliver these childcare supports on behalf of my Department.

The policy paper for the introduction of the ACS was approved by Government in October 2016. Since then, officials of my Department and Pobal have been working intensively to plan for the implementation of this Scheme. This is an extremely complex and ambitious project because of all that is involved – legislation, new business processes, data protection and building a new IT system. We will need to integrate data from the Department of Social Protection and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners so that the system can calculate every family's net income and Affordable Childcare Scheme subsidy. We will need to test the IT system rigorously to make sure it works, even in complicated family circumstances. While my officials are working as quickly as possible, I believe it is prudent to take the time to ensure we get the new systems right, so that they operate smoothly for everyone. The ACS will be introduced at the earliest possible date, while ensuring that the scheme is fully operational and user-friendly for all concerned. In the meantime, I am satisfied that the new measures commencing this September honour the Government's commitment to delivering more affordable childcare to families.

HIQA Inspections

1946. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the HIQA inspection report of 12 June 2017 into foster care services in counties Louth and Meath the actions that have been taken to address the concerns raised in the report; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28564/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As part of its 2017 Monitoring programme, the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) are conducting thematic inspections across 17 Tusla service areas, focusing on the recruitment, assessment, approval, supervision and review of foster carers. These inspections cover eight standards in the National Standards for Foster Care and inspections are announced in advance. The inspection report referred to by the Deputy found that of the eight standards assessed during the inspection, one standard was fully compliant, six were substantially compliant, and one was found to be non-compliant (major). Prior to publishing the inspection report HIQA provided Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, with an opportunity to develop an Action Plan addressing the findings of the report and the Action Plan has been published with the Report. The plan provides details and timelines for the implementation of specific actions to address the concerns raised in the report.

The standard that HIQA found was non-compliant (major) was related to formal reviews of foster carers. The HIQA inspection found that over half of foster carers had not had a formal foster carer review for more than three years and that recommendations from reviews were not consistently implemented in a timely manner

The following actions have been or will be undertaken to address the issues identified, with an indicative timeline provided.

1. A comprehensive schedule of foster care reviews has been devised to ensure that all foster carers are formally reviewed by March 2018. This schedule will be reviewed at the Quality Assurance & Oversight Group which is chaired by the Area Manager.(From March 2018).

2. The Foster Care Committee (FCC) will have an increased role in the oversight of foster care reviews. The schedule of formal reviews has been provided to the FCC chair who will monitor the outcome of reviews.

3. The review schedule will be carefully monitored by the Principal Social Worker (PSW) and the Area Manager, and a tracking mechanism is now in place on the foster care register

with regard to current and future foster carers. The implementation of recommendations will be tracked by team leader duty supervision of link social workers and delays in progressing recommendations will be brought to the notice of the PSW and Area Manager (from April 2017).

4. Tusla's Audit Group, commenced in January 2017, will continue to undertake general and themed audits. A themed audit, to be undertaken in October 2017 will focus on implementation of review recommendations.(From 31st October 2017)

Foster Care

1947. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foster carers that are without Garda vetting in counties Louth and Meath. [28565/17]

1951. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons on the Louth Meath foster care committee that are without Garda vetting. [28569/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1947 and 1951 together.

Under Standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care the providers of foster care services are required to ensure that children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect. Foster care services in the counties Louth and Meath were found to be substantially compliant with this standard during a themed Health Information Quality Authority inspection carried out in March 2017. Areas where the provider (Tusla) failed to meet the required standard included instances where Garda Síochána vetting was not updated for all foster carers within the required timeframe. To address this finding all foster carers and family members over 18 years, were sent the e-vetting application on 30th March 2017. All outstanding vetting will be finalised by the 31st July 2017, and a database of completed vetting has been created to ensure for the timely completion in the future.

A recent themed inspection by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) of foster care services in the Louth/Meath area found that up to date Garda Síochána vetting was not on file for each member of the Foster Care Committee in the region. In addressing this finding, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency with responsibility for foster care services in the Louth/Meath region, has processed e-vetting applications forms from all Foster Care Committee members and it is expected that these will be returned by the Vetting Unit by 31st July 2017. A system will be put in place to ensure timely completion of vetting procedures for Foster Care Committee members in the future.

Foster Care

1948. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if appropriate contracts are in place for all foster care placements in counties Louth and Meath. [28566/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has responsibility for foster care services in each of the 17 regional areas, including Louth and Meath. In a recent themed inspection of foster care services in Louth and Meath the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) found that there were 217 foster care households in the area, 159 of which were general foster carers and 58 were relative foster carers. The inspection identified that contracts were not in place for all relative foster carers who had children placed with them, but did not raise this as an issue in relation to general

foster carers. In response to the finding Tusla has undertaken a review and has confirmed that this breach in standards (no contract on the file) was limited to a small number of foster carers (three) identified in the inspection.

Foster Care Provision

1949. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foster carers in counties Louth and Meath that have never been reviewed; and if these reviews have now been completed. [28567/17]

1950. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foster carers in counties Louth and Meath that have not been reviewed in three years or longer; and if these reviews have now been completed. [28568/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1949 and 1950 together.

Under Standard 17 of the National Standards for Foster Care providers are required to ensure that foster carers participate in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high quality care and to assist with the identification of gaps in the fostering service. The recent themed inspection by HIQA of foster care services in Louth and Meath found that Tusla were non-compliant (major) with this standard. HIQA found that over half of foster carers had not had a foster care review for more than three years. It should be noted, however, that while not constituting a formal review, all foster carers had an assigned link worker with responsibility to provide supervision, training and support to foster carers.

Tusla have undertaken the following actions to address the findings of the HIQA inspection:

- 1. A comprehensive schedule of foster care reviews has been devised to ensure that all foster carers are reviewed by March 2018. This schedule will be reviewed at the Quality Assurance & Oversight Group which is chaired by the Area Manager.

- 2. The Foster Care Committee (FCC) will have an increased role in the oversight of foster care reviews. The schedule of reviews has been provided to the FCC Chair who will monitor the submission of the outcome of reviews. The FCC Secretary has included a tracking system for all foster care reviews which will ensure that all foster carers who are reviewed and new foster carers will have an agreed date for review.

- 3 The review schedule will be carefully monitored by the Principal Social Worker (PSW) and the Area Manager, and a tracking mechanism is now in place on the foster care register with regard to reviews. The recommendations made at reviews will be tracked during supervision between Team Leaders and Link Social Workers. Where the progress of the recommendations are not advanced, this will be brought to the attention of the PSW and in turn the Area Manager.

Tusla has informed me that, at the time of the HIQA inspection, there were a total of 118 families without a review in place for over three years. Tusla have given a firm commitment that all reviews will be carried out by March 2018. The Louth/Meath area will also provide three-monthly updates to HIQA on the progress of these reviews, with the first review submitted on 7th June. Since the HIQA inspection a total of 27 reviews have taken place. A schedule is in place to complete the remaining reviews by the March 2018 deadline. *Question No. 1951 answered with Question No. 1947.*

Foster Care

1952. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of allegations and complaints that have been recorded by the Louth Meath foster care committee in 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of these allegations and complaints that have been investigated by an independent social worker as per policy guidelines. [28570/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have asked Tusla to provide information on the number of allegations and complaints that have been recorded by the local Foster Care Committee in 2016 and to date in 2017, and their compliance with policy guidelines in relation to how these allegations and complaints are investigated.

I will revert to the Deputy when this information is supplied.

HIQA Inspections

1953. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the HIQA inspection report published on 12 June 2017, the new process implemented in the Louth Meath area to deal with allegations and complaints; the date on which this new process commenced; and if it has been successful. [28571/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Standard 10 of the National Standards for Foster Care requires that the providers of foster care services (in this case Tusla) ensure that children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect. The recent themed inspection of foster care services in the Louth/Meath area by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) found that Tusla was substantially compliant with this standard. However the standard was not met as HIQA found that complaints and allegations were not consistently managed in line with Children First. The inspection also found that notifications of allegations were not always sent to the Foster Care Committee in a timely way.

In the Action Plan developed by Tusla in response to HIQA's findings, Tusla outlined the steps that have been taken to address the consistency and management of allegations and complaints. This included clear instructions on the management of complaints and allegations to the senior management team and a follow up meeting with Team Leaders (by way of the Dublin North East Policy for the Management of Serious Concerns and Allegations). The purpose of the memo is to ensure that the change in practice was fully communicated across the area. Using a standardised template the Principal Social Worker will receive written notification of all allegations and serious concerns. Oversight will also be provided by the Chair of the Foster Care Committee, who also receives initial and final notifications of serious concerns and allegations. A practice memo has also been issued to all fostering link social workers to ensure that all are aware of the requirement to notify the Foster Care Committee of allegations and serious concerns in a timely manner.

The success of the new approaches adopted on foot of the HIQA inspection will be monitored and reported on in subsequent inspection reports.

Health Services Staff Data

1954. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social workers that are operational in counties Louth and Meath; the vacancies that exist in

the Louth Meath area; and the number of cases that are allocated to each of the operational social workers in the Louth Meath area. [28572/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

HIQA Inspections

1955. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the HIQA inspection report published on 12 June 2017, the number of the 64 foster carers in the counties Louth and Meath that were identified as having no social worker and that have now been appointed a social worker; the length of time that these foster carers were without an appointed social worker; and if all foster carers now have an appointed social worker in place. [28573/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The recent HIQA inspection found that in reviewing 64 foster carers files related to the theme of the inspection, there were 14 foster carers who were without a Link Social Worker. Some of these foster carers did not have children placed with them at the time.

Tusla have informed me that all of these carers now have an allocated Link Social Worker.

Foster Care Supports

1956. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the out of hours support services that are available to foster carers in counties Louth and Meath. [28574/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): At present nationally there is no specific “Out of Hour’s Service”, dedicated to foster carers. However, Social Workers, Team Leaders and Principal Social Workers in the Louth/Meath area have provided support out of hours to foster carers in specific high risk cases.

Foster Care Provision

1957. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foster care homes, foster carers and relative foster carers respectively in counties Louth and Meath. [28575/17]

1958. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of foster carers that are needed to meet demand in the counties Louth and Meath; the actions that will be taken to address the shortfall. [28576/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1957 and 1958 together.

I am informed by Tusla that there are currently 160 general foster carers and 58 relative foster carers in the Louth/Meath area.

Tusla have informed me that there is a requirement for approximately twenty foster carers immediately. Tusla are taking the following actions to address this shortfall;

- All schools in the area will be contacted, requesting that messages to be sent to all parents and teachers, highlighting the need for foster carers in the area.
- Posters/leaflets will be distributed to community groups, health centres, G.P. surgeries, churches, highlighting need for foster carers in the area. The Principal Social Worker for Fostering in the region has met with local community groups in Dundalk requesting leaders within these groups to organise a meeting with the local communities to highlight the need for carers in local communities.
- Contact has been made with local Traveller Groups and groups working with other ethnic minorities, in a bid to recruit from their specific communities, facilitating a better match of children with carers from within their own communities.
- The Children and Young People's Services Committee in the area are working alongside Tusla to help recruit foster carers locally.

Foster Care

1959. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of occasions since 2014 and to date in 2017, that counties Louth and Meath have gone outside of the national standards for foster care recommendations and placed more than two children in one foster care placement . [28577/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The National Standards for Foster Care recommend that no more than two unrelated children are placed in a foster home; however, there is no specific restriction in place with regard to siblings.

At the time of the recent themed HIQA inspection of foster care services in the Louth Meath area there were twenty three foster families who had more than two unrelated children placed in their care.

The number of foster carers in this category fluctuates, as, for example, a child could be placed in care for a night or two, on an emergency basis, and either the child returns home or moves to another foster placement. At all times the area will consider the skill and experience of the foster carer and the needs of the child requiring a placement. If the area assesses that a carer has the capacity to care for an extra child than this will be considered, as opposed to possibly sending a child out of the Louth Meath area, away from family, friends, school, community etc. As one would expect it can be extremely difficult for a child to be received into care. Moving a child from their locality may compound that difficulty, so the fostering department try to avoid this scenario if at all possible.

A Fostering Recruitment campaign is currently underway in the Louth Meath region in order to increase the pool of foster carers locally .

Health Services Staff

1960. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the first and full year cost of hiring additional social care workers. [28592/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Child Care Services Expenditure

1961. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount that has been spent on marketing the affordable child care scheme to date in 2017. [28593/17]

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 Affordable Childcare Scheme.

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.

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 each childcare provider in the country received 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 and officials from the my Department have commenced a series of information events throughout the country. A dedicated website has also been launched (www.affordablechildcare.ie). Since its launch to the public on the 30th May, this website has received over one hundred thousand page views from more than thirty thousand individuals. An awareness campaign via various media, including digital and radio, is also underway.

The overall costs for running the awareness and information campaign for childcare providers and parents is estimated to cost just under €118,000 (Inc. VAT). This cost is inclusive of all design, materials, postage, digital content, information presented on local and national radio as well as the dedicated website which will continue to provide a source of information to childcare providers and parents in the run up to September and until the Affordable Childcare Scheme commences.

The information campaign is on-going so as to raise awareness of the childcare support schemes and subsidies available to parents ahead of their rollout in September. This campaign will also assist with the eventual roll out of the Affordable Childcare Scheme and I am satisfied that it is a worthwhile and necessary exercise to ensure that parents are informed of the enhanced childcare supports available to them from September and that childcare providers feel confident and prepared for the changes made to the existing schemes to deliver these supports to families.

Child Care Services Expenditure

1962. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount

that has been spent on website design and creation for the affordable child care scheme to date in 2017. [28594/17]

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.

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 each childcare provider in the country received 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 and officials from the DCYA have commenced a series of information events throughout the country.

A website (www.affordablechildcare.ie) was also developed, which aims to present clear and accessible information for parents and providers regarding the measures commencing this September to make childcare more affordable. Since its launch to the public on the 30 May, the website has received over one hundred thousand page views from more than thirty thousand individuals. The total cost for designing and developing the website was €6,360. We expect to utilise the website as a vehicle for information regarding these measures up until the introduction of the ACS.

Services for People with Disabilities

1963. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has received correspondence dated 12 June 2017 from a child care provider (details supplied) in County Donegal regarding accommodation for children with physical and intellectual disabilities; if so, if she will meet with the provider in order to discuss the issues outlined therein; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28605/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 20th March 2017 I announced the Early Years Capital programme for 2017 in three strands, as follows:

- Strand 1: Additional Places (€3 million total available – maximum €50,000 per grant);
- Strand 2: Building improvements and maintenance/refurbishment (€500,000 total available, maximum €20,000 per grant, Community childcare services only);
- Strand 3: Natural outdoor play area (€500,000 total available, maximum €5,000 per grant).

The closing date for receipt of applications under this programme was Thursday 27th April. I can confirm however that the service referred to by the Deputy has not submitted an application for funding under any of the three strands of this programme. Since the application process for this capital programme has now closed, and in order to ensure transparency and fairness in relation to the application process, late applications cannot be accepted. However, if Early Years Capital funding (under the three strands outlined above) is a priority for services, I will

revisit this in the context of the 2018 capital plan.

I also made €3 million in capital funding available in 2017 for services providing School Age Childcare which was open to both community/not-for-profit and private services comprising three separate strands, as follows:

- Strand A: Establishment of new School Age Childcare services A grant of up to €20,000 will be available for the establishment of new services

- Strand B: Expansion of existing services A grant of up to €10,000 will be available for the expansion of existing services. The provision of additional places will be a criterion for this grant.

- Strand C: Improvement of existing services A grant of up to €5,000 will be available to improve the quality of the service provided in existing services. This funding is intended to be used to increase the number of school age childcare places available and to also improve the quality of existing school age childcare services.

I can confirm that an application has been received from the service referred to by the Deputy for funding under Strand C of this programme. Applications received under this programme are currently being evaluated by Pobal. It is anticipated that Pobal will be issuing recommendations on funding under this programme to my Department over the coming weeks.

In view of the circumstances outlined above I believe that a meeting with the service referred to by the Deputy would not be of any assistance at this time.

Finally, the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), which is a programme of supports to enable children with a disability to access and fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, was introduced in June 2016 and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. Its goal is to empower service providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every eligible child can fully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted. The degree of support provided through AIM depends on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school service. Under AIM Level 5, a minor alterations grant of up to €7,000 can be applied for. However AIM does not cover larger scale capital grants.

Counselling Services Provision

1964. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to provide further funding to an organisation (details supplied) in order that it can continue to provide youth counselling services in view of its importance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28648/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the services referred to are HSE services, and the matter is therefore under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

1965. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all State bodies under the aegis of her Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has

complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28664/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The agencies under the remit of my Department are committed to full compliance with taxation laws and it can be confirmed that they discharged their tax liabilities for the year 2015. Reports in respect of their 2016 financial statements will be submitted in due course upon certification of their accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Aftercare Services

1966. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated full year cost of employing an aftercare worker. [28702/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Care Services Provision

1967. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated full year cost of employing a social care worker in a residential care home. [28703/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Family Resource Centres

1968. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the proposed Tusla family resource centre for Castlerea, County Roscommon; the time-frame for when the centre will open; the location of the new centre; the way the centre will be funded; the proposed number of staff involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28882/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides financial support to some 109 communities through the Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme. This typically covers the employment of two to three members of staff and some overhead costs. In 2017, Tusla's current allocation to the Family Resource Centre Programme is approximately €13.5m.

Tusla has advised that it is working with West Training & Development CLG, Regional Support Agency to establish the Castlerea Family Resource Centre (FRC). A Needs Analysis Report for Castlerea Family Resource Centre has been completed and Tusla is meeting with a range of stakeholders in Castlerea this week in order to provide feedback on the findings of the report.

The immediate aims in progressing the establishment of the Family Resource Centre in

Castlereagh are to recruit a Voluntary Board of Directors and a project co-ordinator, and to secure suitable premises.

Tusla plans to build on the strengths of the Family Resource Centre Programme in the years ahead to deliver its mandate for community-based early intervention and family support.

Departmental Funding

1969. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consider allocating funding for counselling to an organisation (details supplied) on an interim basis in view of the fact that a centre (details supplied) has closed and there is no timeframe for when a planned Tusla family resource centre will open in the town and there is currently a void in services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28883/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency in relation to this matter. I will revert to the Deputy once I have been furnished with a response by Tusla.

Counselling Services Provision

1970. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the status of a free youth counselling service operated by an organisation (details supplied); the amount of funding allocated to the service from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; if there is a risk of closure of the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28913/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the service referred to is a HSE service, and the matter is therefore under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Child Care Services Provision

1971. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the universal child care subsidy; if the €20 a week will be available from September 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28927/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 11 April, I made an announcement that the Affordable Childcare Scheme would not commence this September but that a range of measures will be introduced by my Department to make childcare more affordable for thousands of families throughout Ireland. This honours a key commitment in the Programme for Government. I can confirm that these measures, which will benefit the families of tens of thousands of children, will commence this September. As part of these new measures, a new universal subsidy will be available for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age (or until they qualify for ECCE if later than 36 months) in registered childcare. This will amount to as much as €20 a week or €1,000 per year for children in full time childcare.

Departmental Staff Relocation

1972. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff under the remit of her department that have applied to be transferred to department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29033/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As my Department has no offices outside the Dublin region, the issue of staff applying for transfers to internal locations outside Dublin does not arise.

With regard to applications to transfer to other Departments or State Agency offices, my Department does not operate a transfer list. Staff may have their interest in a transfer listed with other Departments who hold a transfer list, or they may seek a possible transfer by means of a “Head to Head” transfer by directly contacting a person willing to transfer with them. My Department only becomes aware of such possible transfer requests when staff have identified suitable opportunities. At such time, it is at the discretion of the Departments concerned to agree to the transfer arrangements, having regard to sick leave and performance assessments.

My Department has no information on the number of staff who may have applied using the methods above for transfers to other locations in the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017. No such actual transfers occurred in the years 2014 to 2016 or to date in 2017.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1973. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26525/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady was disallowed by a deciding officer (DO) who decided that she did not satisfy the medical conditions for the scheme. Notification of this decision and the reason(s) for it issued to the person on 23 January 2017.

The person in question has lodged an appeal with the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). All the relevant papers requested by that Office are being prepared and will be submitted by my Department shortly. The SWAO will be in touch with the person in due course in relation to the progress of the appeal.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer’s Allowance Waiting Times

1974. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current waiting list for those who have applied for carer’s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26531/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer’s Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

This means that the care recipient requires from another person continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continual

supervision in order to avoid being a danger to him/herself and is likely to require such full-time care for at least 12 months.

The current average processing times for a CA application is around 12 weeks. The CA scheme has seen a considerable increase in applications in recent years; applications for CA in 2016 were 20% higher than in 2015.

My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Reducing these waiting times is a priority for my Department and we are working hard to make this happen. As part of its programme of service delivery modernisation, a range of initiatives aimed at streamlining the processing of claims, supported by modern technology, have been implemented by my Department in recent years. Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised.

In addition, staffing needs are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources. Where additional staffing is deployed to a scheme, there is a time-lag involved while those staff are trained and build up expertise. My Department has seen a significant reduction in CA processing from 22 weeks at the end of May 2016 to 12 weeks at the end of May 2017 and expects the processing times for the CA scheme to reduce further over the next few months, as recently assigned staff get up to speed with the work involved in claim processing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

1975. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for a reduction in payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26532/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): There is no limit to the amount of hours a person in receipt of disability allowance can work. However, as disability allowance is a means tested scheme, income from employment is assessable. A person may apply for a rehabilitative disregard, which allows the person to earn up to €120 per week without any effect on their disability allowance payment.

Following a review of the entitlement of this lady, an increase in her payment has been awarded with effect from 24 May 2017. Payment at the higher rate will commence on 14 June 2017 and any arrears due will also issue on that date. Notification of this decision issued on 7 June 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1976. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26533/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):

This lady has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 24 August 2016. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 5 July 2017.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

1977. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an invalidity pension application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26535/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

A claim for IP was received from the gentleman concerned on the 22 May 2017. In order to establish medical suitability, two forms for completion issued to him on the 29 May 2017. On receipt of the completed medical report forms, the IP claim will be processed as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

1978. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an analysis of potential risks to State pensions has been conducted with regard to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26564/17]

1979. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of a hard Brexit scenario on child benefit payments between the United Kingdom and the State in Northern Ireland only; the value of child benefit payments made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26567/17]

1996. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the threats identified by her Department with regard to the responsibilities of her Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26909/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1978, 1979 and 1996 together.

It is important to state that the current arrangements for social security between Ireland and the UK, and the UK and EU27, have not changed. All social welfare payments, including pensions and Child Benefit, continue to be paid as normal.

The Government's long-term objective is to ensure that the reciprocity of civic rights and

social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain under the Common Travel Area (CTA), are safeguarded and maintained. The importance of maintaining the CTA has been acknowledged in Prime Minister May's letter of 29 March 2017 triggering Article 50 of the TEU and the European Council guidelines of 29 April 2017.

The Department is conducting an assessment of the implications for relevant social security schemes and services including pensions, Child Benefit and services between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland. This is part of the ongoing Brexit analysis for input into the wider Government deliberative process.

For information and with regard to Child Benefit there are, at present, 790 families living in Northern Ireland to whom Child Benefit is paid in respect of some 1,720 children. The number of recipients living in the UK is lower with 60 families receiving Child Benefit in respect of 115 children. The estimated cost of these payments is just under €3 million per annum.

More broadly, on 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectorial challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last. Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. The Government's contingency work is examining all scenarios and the outcome cannot be pre-empted at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning to prepare for these.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1980. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26601/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 13 January 2017. This application was awarded for the period 19 January 2017 to 25 January 2017 and payment issued to the nominated post office on 26 April 2017.

The person concerned has no entitlement to CA from 26 January 2017 as another person was awarded carer's benefit from that date in respect of the same care recipient.

The person concerned requested that her application be backdated to 16 November 2015 and this request was disallowed. The person concerned was notified on 26 April 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of appeal.

The Department was notified on 25 May 2017 that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision is being prepared and will shortly be forwarded along with the file to the SWAO for determina-

tion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

1981. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for his claim made in her amendment to the Fianna Fáil Private Members' motion on the independence of local citizens' information services that the Citizens Information Board made a decision to restructure the local citizens information services at a meeting on 17 February 2017 when this decision is not recorded in the minutes of this Citizens Information Board meeting which are available online; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26638/17]

1982. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the discrepancy of accounts between herself and the chief executive of the Citizens Information Board as to when a decision was made to restructure the governance of locally formerly independently run citizens information centres (details supplied). [26639/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1981 and 1982 together.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for providing information, advice (including money and budgeting advice service) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. CIB delivers on this remit through a network of delivery partners, which includes 51 local Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) and 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS). In 2017, CIB is set to receive State funding of €54 million, of which €15 million is allocated to CIS services, and €24 million is allocated to the network of MABS services.

Extensive consultation on the proposed restructuring of governance arrangements has taken place over a number of years since CIB commissioned a feasibility study to identify options for organisational integration of its delivery partners. The work, carried out by Pathfinder, approached the study with a firm focus on detailed consultations with all stakeholders including local services, representative bodies, local boards, staff and in the case of CIS's, volunteers.

In September 2014, Pathfinder presented four options to the Board of CIB. Feedback was received from the delivery partner services and channelled through the National Association of Citizens Information Services, the representative body for Citizens Information Services; the National Management Forum; and National Executive Committee, the representative bodies for management and staff of the MABS companies. In October 2014, the Board of CIB heard submissions from all three representative bodies.

The decision that change was needed in the structure of delivery partner companies was confirmed by the Board of CIB at its November 2014 meeting. This is recorded in the Register of Board decisions. The Board also agreed that a Design Group be tasked with presenting options on new organisational models for its consideration. The work of the Design Group took place in 2015 and recommended restructuring on a regional model basis. In October 2016, having reviewed the output of the Design Group, the Board decided to proceed with restructuring on a regional model basis. This is also recorded in the Register of Board decisions. The Board established a Restructuring Sub Committee to progress this work and report back to the Board of CIB in January 2017.

On 15th February 2017, following detailed discussion on the Report of the Restructuring

Sub-Committee, the Board of CIB decided to adopt the Report and proceed with its implementation. The new governance model referred to in the Report comprises of eight regions with eight MABS companies and eight CIS companies. The adoption of the Report, containing the eight region model recommendation, is noted in the minutes and recorded in the Register of Board decisions.

The decision taken by the statutory Board of CIB comes after a lengthy period of consultation and detailed consideration of the options and views put forward at all stages. I am confident that the membership of the Board of CIB, which comprises experienced and competent individuals, representative of a broad spectrum of interests and which includes representatives of the Citizens Information Service and Money Advice and Budgeting Service, has made this important decision in the best interests of the citizens of Ireland, whom the Board serves.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

1983. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Social Protection the provision in the Comhairle Act 2000 or the Citizens Information Act 2007 which empowers the board of the Citizens Information Board to unilaterally alter the local board structure of independently run citizens information centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26640/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the statutory body responsible for providing information, advice (including money and budgeting advice service) and advocacy services on a wide range of public and social services. CIB delivers on this remit through a network of delivery partners which includes 51 local Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) and 42 local Citizens Information Services (CIS). In 2017, CIB is set to receive State funding of €54 million, of which €15 million is allocated to CIS services, and €24 million is allocated to the network of MABS services.

The Board of CIB, as a statutory body, has the right to make decisions on its day to day operational activities as it sees fit. The powers and functions of the Board are set out in Sections 6 and 7 of the Comhairle Act, 2000 and as amended by section 4 of the Citizens Information Act 2007.

Section 8 of the Comhairle Act, 2000, requires that the Board of CIB submits its three year Strategic Plan to the Minister for Social Protection and once approved, the Plan is laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. Successive CIB Strategic Plans have been working towards the goal of joined up citizen centred services and the need to change structures and processes to enable more efficient use of resources, which are entirely publically funded. The current Strategic Plan 2015- 2018 is designed to ensure CIB and its delivery partner services meet the needs of citizens over the three year period in the most organisationally and economically effective way.

The Plan details six priority areas, one of which is to revise the structures of CISs and MABS to better serve the citizen by improving management structures and governance, management of resources and the delivery of consistent high quality services; this includes aligning CIB structures accordingly to maximise effective use of resources.

In January 2016, CIB's Strategic Plan 2015-2018 was approved by the Minister and noted by Government. The decision taken by the Board of CIB on the 15th February 2017 to move from a governance structure of 93 individual local companies to a new sixteen company regional board model is entirely in keeping with CIB's Strategic Plan, as approved by the Minister, noted by Government, and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

1984. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households in each county in receipt of rent supplement in tabular form. [26648/17]

1985. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households in each county that have had their rent supplement increased above the prescribed rent limit, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26649/17]

2082. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of increasing rent supplement and HAP limits in line with market rents. [28518/17]

2104. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing rent supplement limits nationwide by 10%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28869/17]

2133. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing rent supplement limits and HAP limits to county market rents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28987/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1984, 1985, 2082, 2104 and 2133 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 42,300 recipients for which the Government has provided €253 million for in 2017.

Rent supplement is subject to a statutory limit on the amount of rent that an applicant may incur. The Department carried out a review of the rent limits in line with the commitments contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government. Increased limits for rent supplement were introduced in all areas of the country with effect from 1 July 2016 at a cost of up to €12 million in 2016. The rent limit review conducted represents a realignment of the maximum rent limits with agreed rents generally benchmarked against the 35th percentile of those rents registered with the Residential Tenancies Board.

Initial analysis shows that increasing rent limits by 10%, for 42,300 rent supplement recipients, would result in a full year cost of approximately €32 million. The use of market rents, as published by the residential tenancies board for Q1 2017, would result in full year additional costs of approximately €45 million. Any proposed increase in maximum rent limits must consider the implications for the wider residential market, in particular any distortion which may reduce availability and alternatives for low income working families renting. Previous analysis has shown that increasing rent limits would have a very limited impact in the provision of additional units for the scheme given the extremely low levels of supply of available rentable housing stock being experienced throughout the State. Costs related to housing assistance payment scheme are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

In recognition of the on-going rental market difficulties, my Department implements a targeted case-by-case policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits. Since the introduction of this flexible approach during 2014, almost 11,800 persons at imminent risk of homelessness have been supported through increased rent

supplement payments. To date in 2017, in excess of 1,000 recipients have been supported with increased rent payments. A county breakdown of the payments made in 2017 and overall recipient numbers is provided in the attached tabular statement.

As the Deputies will be aware that the strategic policy direction of the Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support with the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, now available nationwide.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Tabular Statement: County analysis of rent supplement recipients & increased payments awarded in 2017

County	No. of Rent Supplement Recipients	Total No. of increased payments by County in 2017
CARLOW	504	19
CAVAN	344	12
CLARE	287	0
CORK	4,287	8
DONEGAL	241	0
DUBLIN	19,004	652
GALWAY	2,145	13
KERRY	1,374	73
KILDARE	2,299	54
KILKENNY	261	2
LAOIS	769	0
LEITRIM	223	6
LIMERICK	872	9
LONGFORD	339	7
LOUTH	703	13
MAYO	871	0
MEATH	779	34
MONAGHAN	162	0
OFFALY	442	5
ROSCOMMON	481	14
SLIGO	216	0
TIPPERARY	649	23
WATERFORD	390	2
WESTMEATH	1,065	35
WEXFORD	1,745	1
WICKLOW	1,819	60
GRAND TOTAL	42,271	1,042

Family Income Supplement Data

1986. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of households in each county in receipt of family income supplement, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26650/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 24 May last there were 57,090 people in receipt of a family income supplement, a breakdown of this number by county is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

Tabular statement

Number of Family Income Supplement recipients at 24 May 2017 by county.

County	Recipients
CARLOW	954
CAVAN	1,268
CLARE	1,288
CORK	6,025
DONEGAL	2,708
DUBLIN	13,462
GALWAY	2,714
KERRY	1,720
KILDARE	2,356
KILKENNY	979
LAOIS	1,059
LEITRIM	365
LIMERICK	2,467
LONGFORD	771
LOUTH	2,185
MAYO	1,590
MEATH	2,293
MONAGHAN	1,115
OFFALY	1,085
ROSCOMMON	703
SLIGO	757
TIPPERARY	2,168
WATERFORD	1,824
WESTMEATH	1,247
WEXFORD	2,393
WICKLOW	1,478
OTHERS	116
Total	57,090

Poverty Data

1987. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the rates of poverty, consistent and at risk of poverty and deprivation in each region in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26652/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department recently published the Social Inclusion Monitor 2015 providing an update on the social situation in Ireland, including progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction. The Monitor reported continued improvements in poverty, income inequality and living conditions in 2015. The final section discusses the spatial distribution of consistent poverty – a measure that combines relatively low income and deprivation. The rate nationally in 2015 was 8.7%. This compares to the low of 6% in the Mid-East region and high of 11.9% in the Border region. Five of the eight regions had consistent poverty rates below the national average – see Table 1. The remaining

regions, the Border, South-East and South-West, had levels above this. It should be noted when considering these figures that the SILC survey, on which they are based, is designed to provide estimates on income and living conditions at the state level. While estimates can be calculated at the regional level, they are more volatile due to the inevitably smaller sample sizes.

Looking now at the two supporting indicators, the at-risk-of-poverty rate was lowest in the Dublin region at 12.7% and highest in the Border region at 22.9%. This compares to a national average of 16.9%. Four of the eight regions had at-risk-of-poverty rates above the national average (i.e. the Border, West, South-East and South-West). In 2015, the basic deprivation rate was lowest in the Mid-West region at 16.2% and highest in South-West region at 32.8%. The comparative national rate was 25.5%. Four of the eight regions had deprivation rates above the national average (i.e. the Border, Midlands, South-East and South-West).

Given the continuing economic recovery throughout 2015 and measures introduced in the Budgets since 2015, it is reasonable to expect future poverty figures to show improvement. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

The Government's strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion is set out in the updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, which reflects the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. The Plan identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. The Department will review the Plan this year, as it reaches the end of its current term, with a view to developing an updated plan for future periods. The Department will also review the national social target for poverty reduction. This review will be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Table 1: CSO 2015 SILC poverty rates by statistical indicator and region

2015	Border	Mid-lands	West	Dublin	Mid-East	Mid-West	South-East	South-West	Popula-tion
At-risk-of-pov-erty rate (%)	22.9%	16.8%	21.2%	12.7%	14.8%	14.2%	20.3%	18.8%	16.9%
Depri-vation rate (%)	30.2%	28.7%	23.2%	22.7%	25.8%	16.2%	26.1%	32.8%	25.5%
Con-sistent poverty rate (%)	11.9%	8.4%	8.5%	7.4%	6.0%	6.8%	10.1%	11.4%	8.7%

Carer's Allowance Applications

1988. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26683/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 12 April 2017.

Additional information in relation to the person's application has been requested by a deciding officer on 6 June 2017. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1989. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on a domiciliary care allowance to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26713/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 22nd of February 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Applications are processed in date of receipt order. Due to the increasing volume of applications being received, it can currently take approximately 18 weeks to process an application for DCA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

1990. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding workers having to retire at 65 years of age; if she will address the issue of these workers having to claim jobseeker's payments before they can receive a pension at 66 years of age; her plans to address this problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26737/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is no statutory 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.

Where a person exits the workforce before reaching State pension age they may apply for either the jobseeker's benefit or jobseeker's allowance schemes. Jobseeker's payments are paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years and all recipients of a jobseeker's payment are subject to the rules of the scheme.

People in receipt of a jobseeker's payment must engage with my Department's activation measures and can face sanctions if they fail to do so. However, from January 2014 these criteria were eased for people aged 62 and over. They are still able to voluntarily avail of an array of supports, which is available from my Department if they wish to return to work, training or education. Furthermore the majority of these individuals will have to register with their local office only once a year and their payments will be paid directly into their bank accounts.

Once a person has exhausted their entitlement to jobseeker's benefit they may be eligible for jobseeker's allowance, subject to the means test and other qualifying conditions. However, someone claiming jobseeker's benefit from a date after their 65th birthday continues to be eligible for that payment until reaching State pension age.

These provisions have enabled these individuals to ease their transition into one of the jobseeker's schemes until they become eligible for a State pension on their 66th birthday.

Disability Allowance

1991. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) can be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26764/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 3 April 2017.

On 1 June 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Data

1992. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost of increasing all non-working age payments under the remit of his Department by €3 to €10 respectively by payment, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26775/17]

2006. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost of increasing the qualified child increase payment in increments (details supplied) in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27067/17]

2008. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of giving an additional €5.00, €10.00, €15.00 and €20.00 to all those in receipt of disability allowance, blind pension, invalidity pension and carer’s allowance, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27070/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1992, 2006 and 2008 together.

The costings sought by the Deputy are detailed in the following series of tables.

Table 1: Cost of increasing all non-working age payments by varying amounts

Increase all non-working age weekly payments by:	Full Year Cost €m
€3.00	88.80
€4.00	118.40
€5.00	148.10
€6.00	177.70
€7.00	207.50
€8.00	236.70
€9.00	266.50
€10.00	296.10

For the purpose of the costings in Table 1, it was presumed that the Deputy was referring to pension age payments, namely: State Pension Contributory, State Pension Non Contributory, Widow/er’s or Surviving Civil Partner’s (Con) Pension (for those aged 66 and over), Deserted Wife’s Benefit (for those aged 66 and over), Death Benefit Pension (for those aged 66 and over) and Carer’s Allowance (for those aged 66 and over).

Table 2: Cost of increasing the Qualified Child Increase to varying amounts

Increase the weekly rate of the Qualified Child Increase payment from €29.80 to:	Full Year Cost €m
€31.00	23.80
€32.00	43.60
€33.00	63.50
€34.00	83.30
€35.00	103.10
€36.00	123.00
€37.00	142.80
€38.00	162.60
€39.00	182.50
€40.00	202.30

Table 3: Cost of increasing Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension and Invalidation Pension by varying amounts

Scheme	Full year cost of a €5 increase €m	Full year cost of a €10 increase €m	Full year cost of a €15 increase €m	Full year cost of a €20 increase €m
Disability Allowance	35.1	70.1	105.2	140.2
Blind Pension	0.35	0.7	1.05	1.4
Invalidation Pension	16.1	32.1	48.2	64.2
Carer's Allowance	13.5	27.0	40.5	54.0

It should be noted that the costings listed above in Tables 1 & 3 include proportionate increases for qualified adults and for those on reduced rates of payment, where relevant. It should also be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

1993. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will use an annual P60 and annual earnings to assess if a person qualifies for family income supplement rather than examining a recent payslip; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are being unfairly assessed using this method such as persons that avail of term time working year and work nine months rather than 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26779/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In order to calculate assessable income for the purposes of Family Income Supplement (FIS), it is important to use the most appropriate method of calculation based on a customer's employment circumstances in line with the relevant legislation which is contained in S.I. 142 of 2007, Article 173.

In the case of a new FIS application, a Deciding Officer (DO) would usually base their calculation on the average weekly gross earnings up to the date of application.

In the case of a FIS renewal application, a DO would usually base their calculation on the average weekly gross earnings in the previous tax year using a P.60.

However, S.I. 142 of 2007, Article (2) allows a DO to consider other periods if they deem it more appropriate for estimating assessable family income.

Maternity Benefit Administration

1994. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of time it is taking to process maternity benefits; the amount of time persons are waiting for their benefit to be paid; if her attention has been drawn to the stress caused especially for persons with no other income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26822/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department continues to make good progress on processing the backlog of maternity claims and I can report that all claims relating to people who have already commenced their maternity leave have now been processed. The Department is currently processing claims where the expectant mother is commencing her maternity leave in the current week and the waiting time for these customers has been eliminated.

Claims are processed by reference to the ‘commencement of maternity leave date’ as this ensures that as many new mothers as possible have their claim awarded by the time they take their maternity leave. Once a decision is made and the claim has been awarded, and where the leave has already commenced, payment issues on the following Monday and this payment will also include any arrears due to the customer at that point.

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

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

1995. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason Pobal has taken the decision to withdraw funding support via the community services programme which was previously provided to a company (details supplied) in County Donegal; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that members of the client company have expressed dissatisfaction with this decision and did not voluntarily withdraw from the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26871/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The organisation referred to by the Deputy is a not-for-profit co-operative society working to promote tourism and arts and crafts in the Inishowen peninsula in county Donegal. The company operates from two offices based in Buncrana and Carndonagh, which open five days per week. The company manages the website www.visitinishowen.com, develops packages and marketing material, prints brochures, collates visitors data and works with tourist trade operators to promote and package Inishowen as a ‘must see’ holiday destination. The company receives Community Services Programme (CSP) funding of €117,645.50 per annum, which supports the employment of a manager and

4.5 staff delivering the service.

Following concerns raised regarding the company in early 2016, Pobal, on behalf of my Department, commissioned an independent review of its governance arrangements. The report, completed in December 2016, identified a number of serious governance issues and made 22 recommendations to address these. The company was issued with the report on 22nd December 2016 and was given a deadline of 30th April 2017 to make progress on the recommendations of the report.

Unfortunately, the company has failed to make sufficient progress in implementing the report's recommendations and, in the circumstances, they were informed that CSP funding for the service could not continue through them beyond 30th June 2017. This decision was accepted by them at a meeting with members of their board on 9th May 2017.

I want to make clear to the Deputy that I do not wish to withdraw funding for the service being provided. However, in light of the governance issues identified, my Department cannot continue to fund the service through the company in question.

Officials from my Department and Pobal are now exploring other options as to how funding for the service can be maintained going forward. It is important to note that the funding will remain in the Inishowen region.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1996 answered with Question No. 1978.

Disability Allowance Applications

1997. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue regarding an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26936/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance on 22 August 2016.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 1 June 2017 and of her rights of review and appeal. No appeal/review has been received to date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Appeals

1998. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding contributory pension payments. [26961/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was awarded a reduced rate state pension (contributory) by a Deciding Officer of the Department on 28th February 2014. I am informed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the person concerned did not submit an appeal of this decision until 09th March 2017.

In the normal course, an appeal against the decision of a Deciding Officer must be made within 21 days of a decision being notified. Appeals received outside of this time limit may be

accepted at the discretion of the Chief Appeals Officer. This limit is not rigidly enforced but in view of the length of time which has elapsed since the person concerned was notified of the decision and in the absence of any explanation for the failure to submit an appeal within the prescribed timeframe, I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an appeal could not be accepted at this late stage.

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.

Public Sector Pensions Data

1999. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if she will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of her Department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26978/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

Neither the Pensions Council nor the Social Welfare Tribunal has employees. The requested information in relation to the pension contributions by public service staff of the Citizens Information Board, Pensions Authority and Pensions Ombudsman is set out in tabular form below.

The public service Pension-Related Deduction (PRD), which is not a pension contribution, is applied to the pay of pensionable public servants, under terms set out in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009, as amended. It is sometimes referred to as the “pensions levy”. The tables below also include the requested information in relation to the Pension-Related Deduction.

Citizens Information Board

YEAR	Employee Contributions to Pension Scheme (excludes Single Public Service Pension Scheme)	Employee Contributions to Single Public Service Scheme:	Amount of Public Service Pension-Related Deductions (PRD)
2010	€ 326,717.00	-	€ 289,290.00
2011	€ 306,469.00	-	€ 279,511.00
2012	€ 295,350.00	-	€ 266,188.00
2013	€ 273,500.00	-	€ 257,807.00
2014	€ 250,002.00	-	€ 231,839.00
2015	€ 231,600.00	-	€ 214,220.00
2016	€ 211,177.00	€ 3,063.00	€ 154,594.00
2017 YTD	€ 72,058.00	€ 4,687.00	€ 54,906.00

Pensions Authority

YEAR	Employee Contributions to Pension Scheme (excludes Single Public Service Pension Scheme)	Employee Contributions to Single Public Service Scheme	Amount of Public Service Pension-Related Deductions (PRD)
2010	€ 118,577.00	-	€ 146,126.00
2011	€ 125,390.00	-	€ 153,306.00
2012	€ 173,532.00	-	€ 184,779.00
2013	€ 133,831.00	€ 1,536.00	€ 178,187.00
2014	€ 134,546.00	€ 5,508.00	€ 169,895.00
2015	€ 115,915.00	€ 5,441.61	€ 144,401.00
2016	€ 97,039.55	€ 21,842.45	€ 125,556.00
2017 YTD	€ 36,080.63	€ 10,848.74	€ 47,511.07

Pensions Ombudsman

YEAR	Employee contributions to Pension Scheme (excludes Single Public Service Pension Scheme)	Employee Contributions to Single Public Service Scheme:	Amount of Public Service Pension-Related Deductions (PRD)
2010	€ 7,315.00	-	€ 11,120.00
2011	€ 7,302.00	-	€ 11,099.00
2012	€ 7,301.00	-	€ 11,099.00
2013	€ 6,909.00	-	€ 10,464.00
2014	€ 6,476.00	-	€ 9,641.00
2015	€ 5,334.00	-	€ 7,418.00
2016	€ 2,003.00	-	€ 2,375.00
2017 YTD	-	-	-

State Pension (Contributory)

2000. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider in the forthcoming budget and Estimates process allowing a person's contributory pension to be based on their best 40 years of contributions (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26983/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Expenditure on pensions, at approximately €7.3 billion, is the largest block of expenditure in my Department, representing some 37% of its expenditure. Demographic change alone will increase this by over €220 million this year. Maintaining the rate of the State pension is critical to protecting older people from poverty.

There are two State pensions related to reaching state pension age. Firstly, the State pension (non-contributory) is a means tested pension and is funded by general taxation. Secondly,

the State pension (contributory) is not means tested and is paid from the Social Insurance Fund.

In Ireland, as in other countries, the contributory pension is primarily aimed at people with sustained contributions towards the Social Insurance Fund which finances it, on a pay as you go basis, and rewards such contributions with greater entitlements and coverage for a range of benefits, including contributory pension entitlements. It is important to ensure that those qualifying for a contributory pension have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension (contributory), all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

To amend the Yearly Average calculation in such a way that would result in higher pension rates for a significant number of pensioners would, in turn, carry a significant Exchequer cost, and reduce the scope for future pension rate increases. Such a decision could only be made in the context of the budgetary process.

The home-makers scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) to be disregarded in the calculation of the pensioners yearly average. This may have the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of their pension, and may in turn qualify them for a higher rate of payment. The disregard does not involve the award of credits, and entitlements are still subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied, including a minimum of 520 paid contributions being paid before reaching pension age.

This scheme was not introduced retrospectively for periods prior to its introduction. My Department has estimated that the annual cost of extending the Homemakers scheme to allow people to avail of the full 20 years currently allowed under the scheme, encompassing periods prior to 1994, could cost some €290m in 2017, and this figure would rise at a faster rate than the rate of increase in the overall cost of State pensions. This is a very significant cost, and the main beneficiaries would be people who already have significant household means, and who do not therefore qualify for an alternative means-tested payment.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a State pension (non-contributory), which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

For example, a person with a yearly average of 20 contributions paid or credited per year may qualify for a reduced rate SPC of €202.80. However, they can instead be paid a higher amount through the non-contributory pension, unless their means are over €52.50 per week (or €105 for a married couple), at a minimum payment rate of €204.50 (maximum rate is €227), which would bring their total personal means (including their pension) to over €257 per week. Their household means test ignores their spouse's state pension, the capital value of their home, and has generous income and capital asset disregards, where applicable. This minimum of €257 doesn't include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance. It is also higher than the €238.30 received by a person solely dependent upon a maximum rate State pension (contributory), who would receive no benefit from any change to the method of calculation of contributory pension entitlements. In fact they would experience a loss if such a change was financed

by reducing the core rate of the State pension, or by moderating increases in the future.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

2001. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if as part of the forthcoming budget and Estimates process she will consider reversing the amount of a State contributory pension a person can receive in their personal rate to the bands that were in existence prior to budget 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26984/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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 current rate bands applying to the State pension (contributory) were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. These rate bands more accurately reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person.

It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands would result in an annual cost at least €60 million in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 million each following year as a greater number of pensioners qualify under the current rules, i.e. €70 million in 2019 etc. The main beneficiaries from such a decision would be better off pensioners who do not qualify for means-tested pension payments, and who did not make sufficient contributions into the Social Insurance Fund to qualify for a full rate contributory pension.

Prior to the introduction of the current rate bands, a person reaching retirement age with a yearly average of 47 contributions (out of a maximum of 52) qualified for the same rate of payment as someone with a yearly average of 20 contributions, despite their much more significant PRSI contribution record, and regardless of their means. A person with the maximum of 52 weeks of contributions paid every year of their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 more than someone with a yearly average of 20 PRSI contributions.

Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives cannot qualify for a contributory pension in their own right as they have paid few or no contributions, or cannot qualify for a full rate as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up

to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate. The rate of payment does not include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance, which would be additional payments where applicable.

The Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the redistributive nature of the Fund.

Any potential improvements for pensioners in the next Budget will be considered in the context of the available resources for pensions and other social protection payments.

More generally, the National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

2002. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons over 66 years of age in receipt of a State pension; the number of persons in respect of whom the qualified allowance is being paid; the estimated number of persons over 66 years of age that are not in receipt of a payment from the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26985/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the number of persons over 66 years of age in receipt of a State pension; the number of persons in respect of whom the qualified allowance is being paid is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

With regard to the estimated number of persons over 66 years of age that are not in receipt of a payment from the State is not collated by my Department. However, this information may be captured by the Central Statistics Office, which is under the auspices of the Department of an Taoiseach, in their Quarterly National Household Survey.

Recipients of state pension aged 66 years plus and Qualified dependents at the end of May 2017

Scheme	Number of Recipients over 66 years of age	Increase for Qualified Adult	Increase for Qualified Child
State Pension Contributory	352,486	63,267	1,890
State Pension Non Contributory	89,536	2,593	521

Disability Allowance Eligibility

2003. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position in relation to issuing a clearance letter in respect of a person now deceased (details supplied). [27015/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In order to issue a letter of clearance, the department requested a schedule of assets of the deceased. The disregard for disability allowance is €50,000. Any amount over the disregard may be assessed and therefore an overpayment may have occurred. In these cases, the file is passed to a social welfare inspector (SWI) to investigate.

The file in this case has been referred to a SWI who will be in contact with the solicitors dealing with the estate of the gentleman concerned. We await the report of the SWI.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

2004. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to develop a data collection system to include gender disaggregation on the level of payments across all State pension schemes; if she will include this data in annual statistical reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27039/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In the third quarter of 2017, my Department will publish the fourth independent Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund.

The report will include a detailed analysis of the gender breakdown of social welfare pensions.

My Department does not produce an estimate of the number of people aged 66 and over who are not in receipt of a State pension.

Pension Provisions

2005. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will remove the band changes introduced in 2012 in order to allow those pensions which were reduced by this change of assessment method to be assessed under the pre 2012 change; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27040/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): 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 current rate bands applying to the State pension (contributory) were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. These rate bands more accurately reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person.

It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands would result in an annual cost at least €60

million in 2018 and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 million each following year as a greater number of pensioners qualify under the current rules, i.e. €70 million in 2019 etc. The main beneficiaries from such a decision would be better off pensioners who do not qualify for means-tested pension payments, and who did not make sufficient contributions into the Social Insurance Fund to qualify for a full rate contributory pension.

Prior to the introduction of the current rate bands, a person reaching retirement age with a yearly average of 47 contributions (out of a maximum of 52) qualified for the same rate of payment as someone with a yearly average of 20 contributions, despite their much more significant PRSI contribution record, and regardless of their means. A person with the maximum of 52 weeks of contributions paid every year of their working life received a weekly State pension of only €4.50 more than someone with a yearly average of 20 PRSI contributions.

Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives cannot qualify for a contributory pension in their own right as they have paid few or no contributions, or cannot qualify for a full rate as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate. The rate of payment does not include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance, which would be additional payments where applicable.

The Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the redistributive nature of the Fund.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2006 answered with Question No. 1992.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

2007. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost of delivering disability awareness training to all staff in Intreo offices not already trained in it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27069/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Social Protection fully recognises the need to support staff and promote disability awareness. It has been very proactive in the provision of training and supports in this area in recent years, with a very positive response from staff.

The Department supports its staff by offering a suite of disability awareness training including Mental Health and Deaf Awareness, Dealing with Blind Customers and general Disability Awareness. The Department also offers courses in SafeTALK suicide awareness, ASIST suicide prevention and Stress Awareness. These are available to all staff in the Department, including staff in Intreo Offices. Since 2013, over 2,500 staff have attended training courses in these areas. In addition, e-learning courses developed for front line public servants by the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) are freely available online to all staff via the Department's Staff Development intranet site. Bespoke, ad hoc training can also be procured where required utilising an External Training Budget.

In conjunction with Mental Health Ireland (MHI) and the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS), Mental Health Awareness workshops have been held in a variety of locations since 2013. During that time 406 staff have attended these workshops which included presentations, discussions, case studies and group activities. The workshops provided tools and strategies to enhance mental health and well-being, increase awareness and understanding, and promote the range of formal and informal supports and resources available.

In response to identified needs, stress awareness training was also delivered with the aim of giving staff confidence and control in managing stress and increasing coping strategies. This training is provided on request, with over 1,250 staff participating since 2013.

With assistance from the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), my Department also provides 'SafeTALK' training to staff. This programme helps prepare participants to identify people with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources. 640 staff have participated in this programme over the last three years. NOSP also provides access to staff from my Department to the more advanced Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) training workshop conducted by the Health Service Executive (HSE). 150 staff have attended this two-day programme which trains participants to reduce the immediate risk of a suicide and increase the support for a person at risk.

My Department also continues to promote awareness among staff by publicising designated awareness days such as World Suicide Prevention Day and World Mental Health Day.

My Department has a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) for its staff with disabilities and their managers. The DLO offers support and promotes awareness of disability issues and services among staff, whilst also facilitating the Department's active participation in the Irish Association for Supported Employment's Job Shadow Initiative and AHEAD's Willing Able Mentoring Programme. This Training Officer has attended AsIAM's Public Sector Training Programme on Autism-Friendly Practises, the NDA's Seminar on Alternative & Inclusive Routes to Employment for People with Disabilities and the NCBI's Seminar on Bridging the Information Gap and has disseminated information from these seminars to Departmental staff. The Department also provides translation, interpretive and Irish Sign Language services as required and is committed to the provision of information in alternative formats where feasible

Induction and orientation training highlights the range of Departmental supports and grant-aid available for both staff and clients with disabilities. These include employment supports for jobseekers with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme, EmployAbility Services and the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, in addition to the Employee Assistance Service.

During 2016, in the context of Departmental commitments under Pathways to Work 2016-2020 to extend and intensify proactive engagement for people with a disability, 67 dedicated Case Officers were nominated across the Intreo network. My Department's Staff Development Unit provided a Disability Awareness Seminar in March 2016 for these Case Officers with

speakers from the National Disability Authority and Epilepsy Ireland. This was supplemented by tailored instructor-led training nationally in Employment Supports for People with Disabilities, and this training has now been incorporated as standard into a new accredited programme for Case Officers, a Level 8 Certificate in Professional Practice in Employability Services, in conjunction with the National College of Ireland (NCI).

Ongoing liaison, via the Department's Disability & Illness Policy Unit, with the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) ensures that information on relevant events and seminars is communicated to Departmental staff.

The Department will continue with its extensive training and awareness in this area. It is estimated that the cost of providing disability awareness training to all staff in Intreo offices in the Department would be approximately €90,000.

Question No. 2008 answered with Question No. 1992.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

2009. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of extending the wage subsidy scheme to those in receipt of the partial capacity benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27071/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The partial capacity benefit (PCB) scheme is designed for people who are on illness benefit, for at least six months, or on invalidity pension and who have retained some capacity for work and wish to work. If awarded, PCB will allow them to continue to receive, in addition to their earnings from employment, a percentage of their illness benefit or invalidity pension payment while working.

The wage subsidy scheme (WSS) is an employment support to private sector employers, the objective of which is to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and thereby increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market. The scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours per week under a contract of employment.

Extending eligibility for the WSS to employers who employ people in receipt of PCB is estimated to cost €2.5 million in a full year. The costing here relates to new PCB participants only, as a WSS payment can only be made where an individual is entering a new job or is in that job for less than 12 months.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Support Services Funding

2010. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the expenditure on the reasonable accommodation fund and the initiatives within it in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27072/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The reasonable accommodation fund for the employment of people with disabilities assists employers in the private sector to take appropriate measures to enable a person with a disability to have access to employment by providing a range of grants. These grants and supports include:

- the workplace equipment and adaptation grant,
- the personal reader grant,
- the job interview interpreter grant, and

- the employee retention grant – this scheme assists in maintaining the employability of an employee who acquires an illness or disability by providing funding to identify accommodation and/or training to enable the employee to remain in their current position or to re-train the employee so that they can take up another position within the company.

The reasonable accommodation fund is a demand led scheme in that expenditure arises in response to applications received. The actual expenditure on this fund is set out in the table below.

Table: Expenditure on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund for People with Disabilities

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Workplace equipment and adaptation grant	€71,176	€81,724	€61,776	€58,108	€54,041	€19,437
Personal reader grant	€27,274	€27,526	€14,499	€11,866	€16,537	€7,722
Job interview interpreter grant	€6,355	€2,767	€1,589	€3,950	€7,244	€2,885
Employee retention grant	€4,320	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Total	€109,125	€112,017	€77,864	€73,925	€77,822	€30,044

The reasonable accommodation fund is one of a range of employment support schemes for people with disabilities managed by the Department of Social Protection since January 2012. Over that time, the reasonable accommodation fund has been regularly promoted, in tandem with the other schemes, through employer engagement initiatives. Furthermore, the Department's own employment case officers' and the staff of the EmployAbility service disseminate information on the scheme to both people with disabilities and private sector employers on a regular basis. Most recently, the operational guidelines and application forms for the grants have been reviewed and revised, so as to ensure that clear and accurate information is provided to applicants to the scheme.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

2011. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection the person or body that partners a company (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27086/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware,

JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. Seetec delivers the JobPath service in an area which encompasses broadly the northern half of the state. In County Mayo, the service is delivered directly by Seetec (i.e. there is no sub-contractor involvement) which has established full-time offices in Castlebar and Ballina and provides outreach services in Achill and Belmullet.

By way of additional information, Seetec has arranged for customers of the service to link in with a number of organisations in the training/educational sphere, for example: Abaris Training Management, Denis Larkin Associates, FRS Training, Gill Group, Jimmy's School of Motor-ing, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board, National Training Solutions, RSA, Safetech and Safeway Health & Safety Consultants.

The training and educational supports provided by these organisations is in addition to the training interventions delivered in-house by Seetec.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Eligibility

2012. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person (details supplied) in County Sligo will have their carer's benefit payment reinstated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27089/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An extension of carer's benefit was awarded to the person concerned on 2 June 2017 and the first payment is due to issue to their nominated post office on 8 June 2017.

Arrears of benefit due from 1 June 2017 to 7 June 2017 will also issue to the post office.

The person concerned was notified of these details on 2 June 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Public Services Card

2013. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether the proposal to expand the range of public services for which a public services card will be required coupled with the proposal for the card to carry a person's date of birth constitutes the introduction of a national identity card by stealth; the range of legal and privacy issues such an introduction by stealth would give rise to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27096/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The idea behind the Public Services Card (PSC) and its underlying identity registration and authentication process is to provide public bodies with substantial assurance as to the identity of individuals they are providing services to and to provide individuals with greater assurance that their identity can't be used by anybody else in dealings with public bodies.

Registration for a PSC is only needed once. All other public bodies will then be able to rely on this without needing to register the same person each time they engage in a public service. This in turn reduces the potential for forgery considerably and consequently reduces the number of people who fraudulently claim to be someone else. It also saves some of the time spent veri-

ifying an individual's identity each time a member of the public tries to access a public service. Small savings for each interaction with an individual represent a considerable overall saving when extrapolated across the public service and the entire population of public service users.

The benefits for an individual are similar to those for a public body. It will make it more difficult for someone else to claim to be that cardholder, thus playing its part in reducing 'Identity theft'. This in turn reduces the potential for someone fraudulently accessing someone else's data. It also saves time and effort for the individual in that they do not have to re-register for every supplier of public services who need to verify identity and it reduces the amount of time spent establishing identity for each transaction.

The legislative provisions governing the PSC and the public bodies which may use it are clearly set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended). This legislation limits the usage of the PSC to those bodies listed and only for those public transaction purposes as defined in it. Accordingly, it is definitively not a national identity card as it has none of the required characteristics of a national identity card such as a person being compelled to carry one or produce it to police if requested or use in private/commercial transactions. In fact, An Garda Síochána may not request a person to produce a PSC. Any proposals in this regard would require changes to primary legislation.

The proposal regarding the date of birth on the PSC is to allow for its inclusion on the face of the card at the request of the cardholder on a voluntary basis. In other words, the date of birth will not be included on the face of the PSC by default but the cardholder may seek to have it there at their choice. This will enable customers who do not have alternative photographic ID to use their PSC to verify their age if they wish.

I trust that this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

2014. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding a disability allowance review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27098/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This person has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 1 March 2017. The first payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 21 June 2017.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Act Employment Targets

2015. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Social Protection the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in her Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of her Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27143/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities, comply with any statutory Code of Practice, meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities and report every year on achievement of these obligations.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) reports on compliance with the 3% target. In its latest published report for the calendar year 2015, the NDA noted that 4.9% of the Department of Social Protection's staff had disabilities.

In relation to the employment of people with a disability by the three agencies under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection, the last figures reported to the NDA for 2015 were: 9.8% for the Citizens Information Board, 16.7% for the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman and 0% for the Pensions Authority. The NDA has acknowledged in previous reports the difficulties that small agencies have in seeking to recruit staff with a disability.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) was launched by the Government on 2 October 2015. The Government has already taken a number of key decisions as recommended in the Strategy, namely a phased increase in the public service employment target for people with disabilities from 3% to 6% and plans to provide alternative recruitment channels and special public service competitions for people with disabilities. These and other recommendations of the Strategy are being considered by a cross-party group chaired by Mr Fergus Finlay of which my Department is a member.

For the past 11 years, Government Departments and Offices in the Civil Service have supported and participated in the WAM (Willing Able Mentoring) programme. WAM is a paid mentored work experience programme which offers graduates with disabilities up to six months work experience and is paid at the first point of the Executive Officer salary scale. This programme gives practical effect to Government and Civil Service policy on improving the employment prospects for people with disabilities. 20 WAM Placements were made in the Civil Service during 2016. The Department of Social Protection has offered 5 WAM Placements in 2017 and the selection process is currently underway with the Public Appointments Service and the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD).

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

2016. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding an application for domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27179/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 29th March 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Due to the volume of applications currently being received, it can take up to 18 weeks to process an application for DCA at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit Data

2017. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full combined cost of increasing maternity benefit by €20, €30, €40 and €50 per week and extending

maternity benefit by 26 weeks, in tabular form. [27209/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is currently estimated that my Department will spend approximately €266 million this year on maternity benefit in respect of an average of 22,000 recipients per week. The table below estimates increasing the duration of maternity benefit by one to twenty-six weeks at the current rate of €235 per week. The table also estimates increasing the duration by one to twenty-six weeks while also increasing the rate of payment of maternity by €20, €30, €40 and €50 per week respectively.

Estimated Cost (€million) of Increasing Maternity Benefit

	Current Rate	(+€20)	(+€30)	(+€40)	(+€50)
Additional Weeks	€235	€255	€265	€275	€285
1	€10	€33	€45	€56	€68
2	€20	€43	€55	€66	€78
3	€30	€53	€65	€77	€88
4	€40	€64	€76	€87	€99
5	€50	€74	€86	€97	€109
6	€60	€85	€97	€108	€120
7	€70	€95	€107	€118	€130
8	€80	€105	€117	€128	€140
9	€90	€116	€128	€138	€151
10	€100	€126	€138	€149	€161
11	€110	€137	€149	€159	€172
12	€120	€147	€159	€169	€182
13	€130	€157	€169	€180	€192
14	€140	€168	€180	€190	€203
15	€150	€178	€190	€200	€213
16	€160	€189	€201	€211	€224
17	€170	€199	€211	€221	€234
18	€180	€209	€221	€231	€244
19	€190	€220	€232	€241	€255
20	€200	€230	€242	€252	€265
21	€210	€241	€253	€262	€276
22	€220	€251	€263	€272	€286
23	€230	€261	€273	€283	€296
24	€240	€272	€284	€293	€307
25	€250	€282	€294	€303	€317
26	€260	€293	€305	€314	€328

These estimates are on a full year basis and assume that any increase in duration or rate is implemented at the beginning of the year. It should be noted that this costing is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2017.

Disability Allowance Applications

2018. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will grant a disability allowance to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27211/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for disability allowance was received from the person in question by the department on 16 December 2016. The claim, based upon the evidence submitted, was disallowed by a deciding officer (DO) on medical grounds on 23 March 2017.

Further medical evidence was received and a review of this decision was carried out. The original decision was upheld and the person concerned was notified in writing on 6 June 2017. She was also advised of her right to appeal this decision to the independent social welfare appeals office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Payments

2019. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 316 of 30 May 2017, the average processing time for seasonal educational workers that are employed on a temporary basis and that have previously been in contact with her Department to receive their jobseeker's payment; her plans to examine if there is a more efficient method by which such workers could receive their payment when their employment ceases for the summer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27260/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The average processing times in May for jobseekers benefit was 1 week and 2 weeks for jobseekers allowance. There are no separate statistics held for seasonal workers. In general, there is no delay in processing jobseeker benefit claims in Intreo Centres if the relevant claim application forms and supporting documentation are completed, as required by the customer, in a timely manner.

Seasonal workers should apply for jobseeker's payment as soon as they become unemployed. Initially, when a person makes an application for jobseeker's benefit, 3 waiting days apply and payment is made from the 4th day of the claim. If, however, a person makes a repeat claim for jobseeker's benefit within 26 weeks of their previous claim, the repeat claim links to the earlier claim and no waiting days apply.

School educational sector workers, who are employed on a temporary basis and who have previously been in contact with the Department, are issued with a repeat jobseeker's application form and holiday form in advance of the school holiday periods. This advance process facilitates an efficient service to these customers and allows for speedy processing of their claim when the period of unemployment actually arises. However, it is important to note that educational sector workers are still required to sign on for each period of unemployment.

I want to assure the Deputy that prompt processing of all claims remains a priority for my Department. Each scheme area is monitored on an on-going basis and processing procedures are reviewed to ensure that claims are paid to customers as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Bereavement Grant

2020. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans for the reinstating of the bereavement grant particularly to those persons that have lost loved ones to suicide; and if it will be restored during the Government's term. [27369/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In recent Budgets my Department has protected primary social welfare rates. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided a significant annual saving and allowed my Department to protect other core social welfare payments such as the State pension.

The number of bereavement grant claims in 2013 was 23,716, and this represented an increase of approximately 4% on 2012. Based on a similar yearly increase each year since 2013, it is estimated that the number of bereavement grant claims that might arise in 2018, were the scheme to be re-introduced, would be in the region of 28,858, with that number likely to increase in future years. The estimated cost of re-introducing the grant at a rate of €850 for 28,858 recipients would be €24.53 million.

As the grant was intended to assist with the costs of a funeral, there were no criteria which differentiated between people bereaved as a result of different causes of death and it would not be considered appropriate that such criteria would be introduced for any future payment of this nature. Any decision to reinstate the Bereavement Grant would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

It's worth noting that there are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include weekly-paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

Additionally, the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Under the SWA scheme, the Department of Social Protection 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 from their weekly income, which may include help with funeral and burial expenses. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional and urgent needs payments in 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

2021. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the timeframe for the self-employed to be able to make claims for invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27388/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Self-employed workers will be eligible for invalidity pension from December 2017. This is a major reform as, for the first time, self-employed people will have access to the safety-net of State income supports, without having to go through a means test, if they become permanently

incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability.

Furthermore, since March 2017, self-employed people have access to the treatment benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental exams, and contributions towards the cost of hearings aids. It is estimated that some 450,000 self-employed contributors including their dependant spouses will be eligible for treatment benefit for the first time as a result of this change.

Treatment benefit entitlements will also be extended from October 2017 to provide further dental and optical benefits for both the self-employed and employees. Over 3 million insured customers, including their adult dependants, will benefit from these additional benefits.

Disability Allowance Appeals

2022. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) of a decision to refuse a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27398/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 17 February 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 19 May 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

2023. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason persons (details supplied) have not received a result to date regarding their jobseeker's allowance application. [27413/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeals from the persons concerned were referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in both cases.

Every effort will be made to hear the cases as quickly as possible and the persons concerned will be informed shortly of the arrangements for the oral hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Dietary Allowance Administration

2024. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to reinstate dietary supplements for persons with coeliac disease and throat cancer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27416/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Diet supplement, administered under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, is payable to qualifying persons, in receipt of the supplement prior to February 2014, who have been prescribed a special diet as a result of a specified medical condition. There are currently over 3,100 persons in receipt of the diet supplement at a cost of €4.6 million in 2017.

Following the outcome of a review of the costs of healthy eating and specialised diets by the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute commissioned by the Department during 2013, the scheme has been closed to new applicants from 1 February 2014. This independent research showed that the average costs across all of the retail outlets of the diets supplemented under the scheme can be met from within one third of the minimum personal rate of social welfare payment, i.e. the SWA rate which was then paid at €186 per week. The weekly rate of SWA has recently increased to €191 further to Budget 2017. The diet supplement scheme was discontinued for new applicants on the basis of this evidence and I have no plans to reverse this decision.

Existing recipients continue to receive the diet supplement at the current rate of payment for as long as they continue to have an entitlement to the scheme or until their circumstances change. This measure ensured that nobody was immediately worse off by the closure of the scheme.

In cases of particular hardship, officials continue to have the legislative power to award a SWA payment in cases of exceptional need. Any person who considers that they may have an entitlement to financial support should contact their local Community Welfare Service who may be able to offer assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme

2025. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase the back to school clothing and footwear allowance; the estimated amount a 50% increase in both the primary school payment of €100 and the secondary school payment of €200 would cost the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27427/17]

2077. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of restoring the back to school clothing and footwear allowance to the 2011 levels of €305 for children over 12 years of age and to €200 for those under 12 years of age. [28513/17]

2118. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider restoring the back to school clothing and footwear allowance to the 2011 level of €305 for children over 12 years of age and €200 for children under 12 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29108/17]

2134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for under 12s to €200 back to 2011 levels and to €305 for over 12s; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28990/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2025, 2077, 2118 and 2134 together.

The back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The allowance will be paid from mid-July to allow parents sufficient time to prepare for back to school.

The rates of the payment for the 2017 scheme are being increased from €100 to €125 for children aged 4 to 11 and from €200 to €250 for children aged 12 years and over. This brings the total allocation for the allowance this year to €47.4 million, an increase of €10 million on what was originally proposed for 2017.

A 50% increase in the 2016 rates would bring the rates to €150 for children aged 4 to 11 and to €300 for children aged 12 years and over. The annual cost to increase the payments to €150 and €300 from the recently announced 2017 rates would be €10 million over and above the €47.4 million now allocated to the scheme for 2017.

On the same basis, the additional cost of restoring the rates to the 2011 levels, i.e. to €200 for children aged 4 to 11 and to €305 for children aged 12 years and older, would be an additional €18.9 million over and above the €47.4 million now allocated to the scheme for 2017.

In addition to the increases in the rates for 2017, the household income limits for the scheme have also been increased to ensure that increases in social welfare announced in Budget 2017 will not affect people's entitlement to the allowance.

Any further changes to the rates of the allowance would have to be considered within a budgetary context and the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

The Deputies may be aware that my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, has recently published a new circular on the measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs, as part of a range of measures to take greater account of the needs of parents and students in the school system.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Departmental Contracts

2026. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Social Protection the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by her Department or any agency or body under the aegis of her Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27456/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested is currently being compiled within my Department and will be made available to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Bereavement Grant

2027. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to restore the bereavement grant; the estimated annual cost of restoring this grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27460/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In recent Budgets my Department has protected primary social welfare rates. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided a significant annual saving and allowed my Department to protect other core social welfare payments such as the State pension.

The number of bereavement grant claims in 2013 was 23,716, and this represented an increase of approximately 4% on 2012. Based on a similar yearly increase each year since 2013, it is estimated that the number of bereavement grant claims that might arise in 2018, were the scheme to be re-introduced, would be in the region of 28,858, and this number would likely increase in future years. If there were 28,858 such grants made in 2018, at a rate of €850 each, the cost would be €24.53 million.

Any decision to reinstate the Bereavement Grant would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

It's worth noting that there are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include weekly-paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

Additionally, the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Under the SWA scheme, the Department of Social Protection 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 from their weekly income, which may include help with funeral and burial expenses. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional and urgent needs payments in 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme

2028. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to increase funding for the free travel pass in 2018. [27478/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The current free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by almost 80 private transport operators. There are currently approximately 882,000 customers with direct eligibility to free travel with an annual allocation of €80 million. The scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. To qualify for the scheme, applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. These are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer's allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

Allocation of funding for the free travel scheme is dependent on a number of factors, including the number of people in receipt of qualifying benefits, the number of participating companies and routes, and fare levels. Other factors that can affect the overall cost include the number of operators who participate in the scheme and potential future fare increases by those operators.

Consequently, the funding for the subsequent 12 months is agreed in the context of the Budget process each year and as such no decision has been made yet to increase funding to the free travel scheme.

My Department is now in a process with Department of Transport and the National Transport Authority with a view to determining appropriate funding arrangements for the scheme but the amount of funding made available for the scheme in any year is still ultimately a matter for Government to decide.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

2029. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the former workers of a company (details supplied) have been written to; when they can expect their payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27532/17]

2030. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there are outstanding issues relating to the pension schemes of a company (details supplied) to which former employees may still have a claim; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27533/17]

2031. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to former members of a company (details supplied) who still have claims outstanding relating to their pension entitlements under pension schemes. [27534/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2029 to 2031, inclusive, together.

The mediated agreement for former Waterford Crystal workers, covers members of the Waterford Crystal Limited Contributory Pension Plan for Staff and the Waterford Crystal Limited Contributory Pension Scheme for Factory Employees, and provides for the payment of –

(a) a tax-free once-off lump sum of €1,200 for every year of pension scheme service (not company service), not exceeding 40 years, plus

(b) payment of monies in respect of pension scheme service which is payable from the normal retirement date of the scheme members (on a fortnightly basis).

During the mediated process, which was facilitated by Mr. Kieran Mulvey, it was agreed by the parties that disputes in relation to individual cases would be referred to an independent dispute resolution process.

I understand that the dispute resolution officer concerned has already sent a final determination to the majority of members who made appeals in relation to contract service and pre-91 service and intends to write to the other remaining appellants shortly. My Department subsequently issued letters to those who were awarded ex-gratia payments in relation to contract service. In respect of this group, payments will be made before the end of the month for those who have returned the necessary documentation and in respect of whom all necessary legal

matters have been completed.

Former workers who left the service of Waterford Crystal in the early 1990s received their full pension entitlements in relation to pre-1991 service under the schemes at that point. The payments made at that time were in full and final settlement of their entitlements under the schemes and were paid in accordance with Pension Regulations then in force. There are no settlements or payments due under the mediated settlement in respect of pre-1991 service.

The finalisation of all aspects of the mediated agreement is a matter of priority, both for me and for the Department. I can assure the Deputy that every effort is being made to progress payments as quickly as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

2032. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27543/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 15 February 2017.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 6 May 2017 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

2033. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an application for domiciliary allowance will be expedited for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27544/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 31st May 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Applications are processed in date of receipt order. Due to the volume of applications currently being received, it can take up to 18 weeks to process an application for DCA at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

2034. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current waiting time for domiciliary care allowance appeals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27687/17]

2035. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current waiting time for all social welfare appeals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27688/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2034 and 2035 together.

The current processing times for all social welfare appeals, including domiciliary care allowance appeals, are outlined in the following table below.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects all aspects of the appeal process including the time spent in the Department preparing the appeal submission. The quasi-judicial nature of the system impacts on appeal processing times which are proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which often require a high level of judgement, in addition to the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

Overall appeal processing times peaked in 2011/2012 and have improved year on year since then. For example, the average time taken to determine an appeal requiring an oral hearing reduced from 52.5 weeks in 2011 to 28.6 weeks in 2014, 25.5 weeks in 2015 and 24.1 weeks in 2016. The average time taken to finalise an appeal decided by way of a summary decision reduced from 25.1 weeks in 2011 to 21.1 weeks in 2014, 18.1 weeks in 2015 and 17.6 weeks in 2016.

Notwithstanding these improvements, the Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times will continue to be a priority for her office and will continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeal processing times by Scheme 01 January 2017- 31 May 2017

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	16.2	30.1
Carers Allowance	20.5	22.8
Carers Benefit	16.3	21.3
Child Benefit	20.5	26.6
Disability Allowance	16.3	21.2
Illness Benefit	27.5	31.0
Partial Capacity Benefit	38.8	29.6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.1	30.4
Deserted Wives Benefit	-	13.7
Farm Assist	22.9	23.3
Bereavement Grant	15.1	-
Death Benefit (Pension)	102.1	-
Family Income Supplement	16.2	29.2
Invalidity Pension	15.8	20.3
Liabale Relatives	18.0	24.1
Maternity Benefit	16.8	19.4
One Parent Family Payment	24.4	31.0
State Pension (Contributory)	24.9	37.3
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	21.6	34.3
State Pension (Transition)	-	81.4

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Occupational Injury Benefit	14.5	28.4
Disablement Pension	19.7	27.3
Incapacity Supplement	54.2	51.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	26.0	21.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	12.9	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.3	24.6
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.7	24.3
BTW Family Dividend	17.7	41.1
Jobseeker's Transitional	13.7	29.4
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	30.1	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	15.6	17.9
Carer's Support Grant *	17.0	23.0
Treatment Benefit	14.0	-
Insurability of Employment	34.8	95.2
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	17.1	23.8
Survivor's Pension (Con)	21.8	35.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	18.2	20.6
Widowed Parent Grant	14.1	-
All Appeals	18.2	24.8

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Social Welfare Benefits

2036. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year cost of increasing the 85% Christmas welfare bonus to 100%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27689/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Christmas Bonus was abolished in 2009, partially reintroduced in 2014 with the payment of a 25% Bonus, and increased to a 75% Bonus payment in 2015. Last December, an 85% Bonus was paid to some 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, including pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and the long-term unemployed, in recognition of their financial dependence on their social welfare payments for all or most of their income.

The 85% Bonus paid last year cost €221 million. The cost of a 100% Bonus is estimated to cost approximately €267 million in 2017. It should be noted that this cost is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for December 2017.

There is no provision in the 2017 Revised Estimates for the payment of a Christmas Bonus. Any decision taken regarding the payment of a Bonus in 2017 will have to be consistent with the legal requirements set out in the Fiscal Responsibility Acts 2012 and 2013, and within the context of achieving the targets set for Ireland by the EU rules.

Departmental Expenditure

2037. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount her Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of

intellectual property and other services. [27715/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A total of €1,785.00 was paid by my Department to the consultancy firm in question during the period 2000 – 2001. No payments have been made by my Department to this firm since then.

The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal. No payments have been made by any of these bodies to the consultancy firm in question.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

2038. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an appeal by a person (details supplied) will be finalised in view of the fact that it was lodged on 11 January 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27789/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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 trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Waiting Times

2039. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the processing times for social protection payment applications (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27839/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Processing Times at 31 May 2017 – average time to award

Schemes	Average time to award (weeks)
Jobseeker's Benefit	1
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
State Pension Contributory (Dom)	5
State Pension Non-Contributory	11*
Domiciliary Care Allowance	18
Carer's Allowance	13
Carer's Benefit	7
Disability Allowance	12
Invalidity Pension	7

*As at end April 2017

Appointments to State Boards

2040. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if any former Deputies have been appointed to State boards under her remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28219/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I understand that the Deputy's question relates to the period 1 November 2014 to date. The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman (which does not have a board) and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

Under the *Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards (November 2014)*, appointments to State Boards are advertised on www.stateboards.ie which is operated by the Public Appointments Service. I can confirm that no former TDs have been appointed through this process to the Boards of any of these statutory bodies during the period in question.

Labour Activation Programmes

2041. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 35 of 31 May 2017, the details of the exceptional cases referred to by which a person could move from JobPath to a community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27955/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Further to parliamentary question number 35 of 31 May 2017, I wish to reiterate the aim of the JobPath service, which is provided for jobseekers only, is to assist them in finding sustainable full time paid employment whereas the Community Employment schemes provide part-time work experience and training opportunities in local communities as a stepping stone back to employment for people on a range of Social Welfare payments including those on long-term unemployment payments.

Customers who are already participating with the JobPath service will not be referred to Community Employment Schemes as they can only participate with one activation scheme or service at a time.

However, customers who on the date of their referral to JobPath have a written offer with a start date within four weeks for CE, TÚS or Gateway will be facilitated to take up the placement. Additionally, customers who have been referred to a CE Scheme specifically for rehabilitation purposes and have a letter of recommendation from either a HSE relevant addiction service or other relevant statutory, community based or voluntary drugs support service within the last year may commence on that CE Scheme irrespective of their referral date to JobPath.

Finally, in a small number of exceptional cases, which are assessed on a case by case basis, taking into account the unique circumstances exceptional to the above which an individual customer may present with, my Department may facilitate a customer to commence on a CE scheme irrespective of their referral date, upon the recommendation of a senior official in the customer's Intreo Office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

2042. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to parliamentary question number 149 of 25 May 2017, the estimated cost of designing and implementing an auto enrolment pension system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27998/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As outlined in my response to parliamentary question number 149 of 25 May 2017, it is my intention to publish and commence the implementation of an Action Plan for the reform of pensions over the coming months. To address low supplementary pension coverage rates, in addition to a range of other long term reform measures, this Action Plan will detail proposals to transition from the current and purely voluntary system to one which will automatically enrol eligible employees into a quality assured retirement savings system from which the individual can opt out should they so wish.

Following publication of this Action Plan, I intend that the detailed evidence building and consultation required to deliver an automatic enrolment system will be undertaken over an initial project planning phase. This will include an investigation of the potential models for delivery and consideration of the costs involved. This information will be used to inform Government in selecting any preferred automatic enrolment operational structure and organisational governance. Decisions around main design parameters such as target membership, minimum contribution rates, financial incentives etc. will also impact on expenditure requirements. Correctly positioning/designing each of these parameters will be fundamental to the success of any system.

Until this work is undertaken during the initial project planning phase and a preferred model chosen, it would not be possible or appropriate to assess the costs of designing and implementing automatic enrolment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Data

2043. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons that paid an S contribution prior to 2011 that had been advised by her Department that they had sufficient pension contributions; the basis on which that advice was issued; the format in which that advice was issued; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many persons now find themselves with insufficient contributions for a full pension payment having followed the Department’s advice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28003/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is the Department’s policy to not predict what a person’s future pension entitlement may be due to the varying factors involved in calculating such pensions.

State pension (contributory) is currently payable from age 66. Under current legislation

- a person eligible for a state pension (contributory) must:
- have entered insurable employment before attaining the age of 56 years
- have at least 520 full rate paid contribution weeks 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 con-

tributions 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.

Accordingly pension eligibility can only be determined by a Deciding Officer following assessment of a person's social insurance record on receipt of a completed application form. Where future pension entitlement enquiries are received, the person is informed that they can request a copy of their social insurance contribution record. It is expected that a new online statement of social contributions request facility, through **MyWelfare**, will shortly become available. The social insurance record, when combined with Frequently Asked Questions about state pension (contributory), will provide some guidance as to what the person's future pension entitlement, if any, might be. Detailed information, including the Frequently Asked Questions, is available on the Department's website www.welfare.ie.

It is likely that there will be a number of changes to state pension (contributory) eligibility conditions over the coming years. State pension age is already set to increase from 66 to 67 in 2021, and to 68 from 2028. In addition, the method by which pension entitlement is assessed is expected to change, moving to a *total contributions* based model in place of the current *yearly-average* method.

A contributor who has not yet reached pension age is best advised to maintain their social insurance record as fully as possible over their working life. In the event that a person ceases insurable employment before reaching state pension age, they may wish to consider payment of voluntary contributions. Information about voluntary contributions, including eligibility conditions, is available by writing to Voluntary Contributions Section, Department of Social Protection, Cork Road, Waterford; by email to volcons@welfare.ie; or by telephone on (051) 356 000 or Locall 1890 690 690.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

2044. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a person is in receipt of invalidity pension, if they have access to a reduced rate of refuse collection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28014/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidation Pension (IP) is a weekly payment to people who cannot work because of a long-term illness or disability and are covered by social insurance (PRSI). IP recipients qualify for the Free Travel pass and, if living alone or with certain "excepted people", to the Household Benefits Package (HBP). The HBP consists of allowances towards electricity or gas, and the free TV licence.

I have no plans to extend the HBP to cover waste collection charges, as the responsibility for waste management policy rests with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCA). DCCA advise that the charges applied by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility

2045. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending jobseeker’s benefit to the self employed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28046/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to seeking “*to introduce a PRSI scheme for the self-employed and provide a supportive tax regime for entrepreneurs and the self-employed*”. This has been one of my key priorities since becoming Minister in this Department. Last Budget Day, I was pleased to extend the level of cover available to self-employed PRSI contributors. Self-employed contributors now have access to treatment benefits since last March and will have access to invalidity pension next December. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed.

It is planned to continue extending cover for other benefits to the self-employed on a phased basis in future Budgets. In 2017, my Department will examine the extension of social insurance to cover new risks and contingencies, including developing proposals on a form of jobseeker’s benefit where a person’s business fails or they can no longer continue working in their profession or trade.

An Actuarial Review of Social Insurance Fund as at 31 December 2015 is currently underway. One of the issues being examined by the independent consultants undertaking the Review is the potential costs in future years of extending cover for jobseeker’s benefit to self-employed contributors including the projected PRSI contribution rates which would be required to extend such cover on a revenue neutral basis. It is planned to publish the completed review next August.

The outcome of the review, including the potential costs associated with further extensions of benefits to the self-employed, will feed into the examination being carried out by my Department on extending access to jobseeker’s benefit, in particular.

The Review generally will project the income and expenditure of the Fund over a 55 year period, taking into account policy, economic and demographic changes since the previous review was undertaken. It will also, for example, project the costs of various options for the indexation of benefits and pensions such as indexation to earnings or prices. The findings of the Review will play an important role in informing the debate on policy developments in relation to the Social Insurance Fund in the years ahead including the financial sustainability of the Fund given the expected demographic challenges.

Maternity Benefit Expenditure

2046. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending maternity leave and maternity benefit for mothers of premature babies (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28047/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to figures from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO), over 4,500 babies are born prematurely in Ireland every year, which in 2014 was 6.6 percent of all births.

Using this figure of 4,500 premature births per annum, the estimated cost for each additional week of paid maternity leave is approximately €1 million per week.

However, this figure does not take cognisance of the fact that maternity benefit is only pay-

able where the mother has the required number of PRSI contributions. To put this in context there were 65,000 births in 2015 but only 44,453 claims for maternity benefit which equates to about 68% of births qualifying for maternity benefit. If the same percentage is applied to the number of premature births approximately 3,060 mothers of premature babies would be expected to qualify for any additional maternity benefit. This would cost approximately €0.7 million per week.

If the duration of maternity benefit is extended in this way there may be pressure to increase the duration of benefit for all mothers – in that case, based on an annual cohort of 45,000 claimants, each additional week would cost approximately €10 million per week.

It should be noted that there are also costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

Social Insurance Fund Deficit

2047. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Social Protection the surplus deficit in the social insurance fund for each of the past ten years; and the accumulated surplus at the end of each of those years. [28102/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the attached table.

It should be noted that the surplus/deficit reported in this table is the difference between the in-year income and expenditure of the fund. This differs from the concept of an actuarial surplus/deficit which compares the liabilities of a fund (to pay benefits, now and in the future, to eligible contributors) with the assets (cash and other investments) held by that fund. Actuarial reviews of the fund are conducted, in accordance with legislative requirements on a five yearly cycle. An actuarial review of the social insurance fund is currently underway and it is expected that the results of this review will be published in the autumn. In addition the fund does not carry a deficit from one year to the next, accordingly the fund is holding a cash surplus of €453m as at the end of 2016.

Social Insurance Financial Position, 2007 to 2016

Year	Income	Expenditure	Surplus / Deficit	Accumulated Surplus/ Deficit at end of year
	€m	€m	€m	€m
2007	7,834	7,251	583	3,632
2008	8,144	8,400	-255	3,377
2009	7,280	9,784	-2,505	872
2010	6,710	9,461	-2,751	-1,879
2011	7,544	8,870	-1,460	-3,339
2012	6,781	8,632	-2,088	-5,427
2013	7,318	8,431	-1,314	-6,741
2014	7,891	8,617	-540	-7,281
2015	8,498	8,764	-119	-7,400
2016	9,217	8,988	453	-6,947

Postal Codes

2048. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount spent by

her Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28145/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department undertook a business change study in 2015 for the Project which cost €7,012.92 inclusive of VAT.

The cost of the contract for IT work detailed above was €298,890.00 inclusive of VAT. The project was completed on time and within budget.

The Department has purchased the Eircode Address Database (ECAD) service to provide ongoing validation of postcodes with addresses at a cost of €36,900.00 p.a. inclusive of VAT. The ECAD also provides access to geocodes as it is correlated directly with GeoDirectory X Y co-ordinates.

There is also an annual Data Access fee of €615.00 (inclusive of VAT) per annum.

Year	Description of costs	Total Costs
2015	Business change study	€7,012.92
2015	Eircodes IT project	€298,890.00
2015	Eircode Address Database (ECAD) service	€36,900.00
2015	Data Access fee	€615.00
2016	Eircode Address Database (ECAD) service	€36,900.00
2016	Data Access fee	€615.00
	Total cost (inclusive of VAT):	€380,932.92

Maternity Benefit Administration

2049. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if it is taking four weeks to process claims for maternity benefit in view of her recent commitment that this matter would be rectified; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28178/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the number of claims awaiting processing where the mother/expectant mother has already commenced her maternity leave has been eliminated. The Department is currently processing claims where the expectant mother is commencing her maternity leave in the current week and the waiting time for these customers has been eliminated. While this does not provide the length of time required to process a claim, I believe it addresses the Deputy’s concern that expectant mothers were waiting for up to 4 weeks to receive maternity benefit payment and I can confirm that there is no longer a waiting period.

The time required to process a maternity benefit claim is not the most relevant factor as claims are processed by reference to the ‘commencement of maternity leave date’ to ensure as many new mothers as possible have their claim awarded by the time they take their maternity leave. Once a decision is made and the claim has been awarded, and where the leave has already commenced, payment issues on the following Monday and this payment will also include any arrears due to the customer at that point.

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

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

2050. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a domiciliary care allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28239/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received for this child on the 3rd February 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Due to the volume of applications currently being received, it can approximately 18 weeks to process an application for DCA at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

2051. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28261/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 18th April 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

2052. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to review the means assessment for disability allowance recipients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28271/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I have no current plans to change the means assessment for disability allowance (DA).

The recently published “Make Work Pay” report, produced by an interdepartmental group, included a number of recommendations in relation to the disability allowance payment. The Government has decided to implement some of these, while others, including any review of the means assessment for DA, will require further reflection and a consultation process with disability groups which my Department has commenced.

A number of immediate changes were announced at the launch of the report in April including a measure to ensure that people with a long-term disability payment who move off the payment to get a job will retain their free travel pass for a period of five years; this is an improvement on the three year period recommended in the report.

The report's recommendation, to dispense with the requirement that work be of a 'rehabilitative nature' for the disability allowance (DA) earnings disregard, was also accepted. Legislation to give effect to this change is included in the forthcoming Social Welfare & Pensions Bill, 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Fraud Investigations

2053. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the sanction request regarding her Department's recent social protection fraud campaign; the details of the comparative study between the cost of the campaign to date in 2017 and the amount recouped as a result of the campaign; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28276/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department administers over 70 separate schemes and services, which affect the lives of almost every person in the State. In 2016, some 1.7 million applications for benefit, assistance and access to schemes were received and processed and over 82 million individual payments were made to people across all age groups and to employers. The scale of my Department's operations and expenditure demands that a robust and integrated range of control and anti-fraud measures are in place. Measures to prevent and detect fraud and enhance controls across the Department's various schemes are set out in the Compliance and Anti-Fraud Strategy which covers the period 2014 – 2018.

The recent fraud publicity campaign was designed to contribute to the overall effectiveness of my Department's control strategy by:

- Promoting discussion on the topic of social welfare fraud and challenge the perceptions of those who see it as a victimless crime;
- Encouraging the reporting of suspected/known social welfare fraud by concerned members of the public and those who have knowledge of wrongful and possible fraudulent claiming;
- Demonstrating that the Government and the Department takes the issue of social welfare fraud very seriously and that it will investigate and prosecute, where this is found to be warranted; and
- Underscoring my Department's obligations, as one of the largest spending Departments in the State, to ensure the integrity of the social welfare system.

I am satisfied that the campaign has been effective in achieving all the objectives set for it and it has received a great deal of public support. Bringing the issue of welfare fraud to the fore in media and public discourse has, I believe, raised debate and challenged the culture and perceptions of those who see welfare fraud as a victimless crime. The campaign has also led to a considerable increase in the level of suspected fraud reporting - a 66% increase in overall reporting during the initial campaign launch period. Two months on since the campaign started, 4,641 reports have been received from members of the public, compared with 3,039 for the same period in 2016. Therefore, the objective of increasing the reporting of suspected welfare fraud has also been achieved.

All suspected fraud reports are now being examined and referred for appropriate follow-up action where this is considered warranted and my Department is very grateful for the public's support in reporting suspected cases of social welfare fraud. Furthermore, the Department's control and anti-fraud measures have received considerable public attention, as have the use

of predictive analytics modelling which my Department is now using to assist in its anti-fraud work.

The level of welfare fraud detected in 2017 that is solely attributable to this campaign would be difficult to measure without making assumptions or inferences as to the role of the campaign in motivating certain individuals to report suspected fraud. It is likely that the campaign will also play a role in deterring welfare fraud in future. It is, therefore, more appropriate to focus on the initial and sustained increased in fraud reporting which was a campaign objective from the outset.

The cost of the campaign was €165,988, excluding VAT. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has sanctioned current expenditure for 2017 up to the limit set out in the Revised Estimates Volume for my Department, subject to a number of conditions. The Department's administration provision for 2017 includes provision for expenditure on advertising. Such expenditure is not subject to individual sanction in respect of specific advertising campaigns but is subject to a condition that public procurement rules are observed in obtaining the services.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Schemes Data

2054. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of payment schemes that have a backlog or are in arrears; the way in which the schemes are in arrears; her plans to sanction overtime for departmental staff to clear backlogs in payment schemes; the cost to the Exchequer as a result of backlogs to payment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28279/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The payment schemes operated by my Department are designed to address certain contingencies that may arise in the course of a person's life. By their nature, at any given time there will be a certain number of claims awaiting decision and my Department is committed to ensuring that claims are processed as expeditiously as possible. Each scheme area is continuously monitored and reviewed to ensure customers are responded to and claims are processed as quickly as possible.

The number of claims awaiting decision at end of May 2017 and the average time to award for each main social welfare scheme is set out in the table appended.

The time taken by my Department to process claims depends on a number of factors, primarily the conditionality and complexity that applies to the relevant scheme. For example, long term schemes with medical or caring conditionality are relatively complex to decide upon and, consequently, do take longer to process. The quality and completeness of the application form and other supporting material is also an important factor. When the number of people applying to any particular scheme increases significantly, it can put pressure on my Department's capacity to process those claims in a timely manner.

It is important to remember that someone who is awaiting a decision on an application may already be in receipt of a payment from my Department and that anyone who is experiencing financial difficulties while awaiting a decision on a claim may have recourse to a payment under the Department's Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, which is operated by the nationwide network of Intreo Centres.

As part of its programme of service delivery modernisation, a number of business process

improvement projects have been implemented by my Department in recent years to streamline the processing of claims and enhance operational efficiency. The Department has also developed and implemented new IT systems to improve our claims processing and management. Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised. Staffing levels are also kept under continuous review to ensure the best use of available resources.

Provision for overtime is made in the administrative budgets assigned to the managers responsible for the administration of the Department's schemes and overtime is used, where appropriate, to address increases in applications awaiting decision or seasonal peaks in demand in respect of particular schemes.

There is no additional cost to the exchequer consequent on increases in the numbers of applications awaiting decision, as, if there is an underlying entitlement to a payment, arrears issue in full once a decision on entitlement is made.

Scheme	Awaiting decision at end May 2017	Average weeks to award
Carer's allowance	4,552	13
Child benefit (domestic)	1,327	3
Disability allowance	5,863	12
Domiciliary care allowance	3,263	18
Family income supplement (new claims)	3,180	3
Illness Benefit	4,428	1
Invalidity pension	1,620	7
Jobseeker's allowance	5,896	2
Jobseeker's benefit	2,088	1
One-parent family payment	1,123	5
State pension contributory (domestic)	3,493	5
State pension non-contributory	2,334	12
Widow/widower/surviving civil partner contributory pension	244	1

Community Employment Schemes Cessation

2055. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason the CES programme based in Killenaule, County Tipperary under the auspices of a company (details supplied) has been wound down in view of the success of the project in placing persons in a large number of worthwhile projects in the parish over many years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28294/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department was unable to offer a contract to Killenaule Parish Enterprise Company, Co. Tipperary, as this company didn't meet the requirements as laid out by the Department. Every opportunity was given to the Company involved to meet these requirements.

All CE participants with Killenaule Parish Enterprise Company have been transferred to other CE Sponsors within the area and their employment is continuing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

2056. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a decision has been made on an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28298/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 20 April 2017. Additional information in relation to the person's application has been requested by a deciding officer on 13 June 2017. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payments

2057. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an exceptional needs payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28327/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An Exceptional Needs Payment in respect of funeral expenses for this customer was processed and paid on 18th April 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

2058. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct rate of carer's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28331/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently receiving carer's allowance (CA) for one care recipient, with an increase for one qualified child. The weekly carer's allowance payment the person concerned is receiving is €238.80. This payment consists of a personal rate of €209.00 and €29.80 full rate for her child. This is the maximum amount that the person concerned is entitled to under the legislation.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

2059. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection the amount of savings a person is allowed to have before it is counted as means for a supplementary welfare allowance payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28341/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. The main purpose of the scheme is to provide immediate and flexible assistance for those in need who do not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

Supports provided under the SWA scheme can consist of a basic weekly payment and/or

a weekly/monthly supplement in respect of certain expenses, including rent, as well as single exceptional needs payments (ENP) and urgent needs payments (UNP).

For the purpose of assessing means when determining eligibility to a basic weekly payment or a SWA supplement, the capital value of savings are assessed as set in the attached tabular statement. The first €5,000 is not assessed in the calculation. The combination of the means test and awarding differentiated rates of payment is premised on ensuring that social welfare payments are paid to those most in need and reflects the position that persons with reasonable amounts of capital and property are in a position to use that resource to support themselves.

This assessment of the capital value of savings does not apply to ENPs and UNPs. Where a person applies for an ENP or UNP and has sufficient savings to meet the need, they would normally be expected to provide for the need from that source.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Formula for Assessment of the Capital Value of Savings for Supplementary Welfare Allowance

Capital	Weekly means assessed as
First €5,000	Nil
Next €10,000	€1 per €1,000
Next €25,000	€2 per €1,000
Any capital over €40,000	€4 per €1,000

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

2060. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the procedure to be followed to facilitate the award of appropriate social welfare payment such as back to education allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) who has returned to education but is currently being pursued by her department for alleged overpayment of jobseeker's allowance which may be reviewed in the context of their parallel entitlement to back to education allowance but who has received no payment since January 2017; if immediate steps can be taken to restore appropriate payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28365/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Entitlement to Back to Education allowance requires that a client is

- in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment for 234 days or nine months in advance of the course commencing and

- must apply for BTEA immediately before they are starting the course of education.

The relevant qualifying social welfare payment in this instance is for Jobseeker's Allowance (JA). The person concerned claimed JA from the 25th August 2016 and as such did not satisfy the requirement to be in receipt of a payment for nine months in advance of the start of the course in September 2016. In addition the client did not advise the Department that she had commenced on an education programme.

The Department received information that the person concerned was a full time student on a third level course from 12 September 2016 while concurrently in receipt of her JA payment. As a consequence her Jobseeker's Allowance claim was disallowed for the period 12th September 2016 to the 14th February 2017. An overpayment of €2,233.33 was assessed because she was

not entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance payment.

If the person concerned has finished her studies and is unemployed, she can apply for Jobseeker's Allowance in Blanchardstown Intreo Centre. If she is continuing with her studies from September 2017, she is free to apply for financial support under the Student Grant scheme. Further details are available at www.studentfinance.ie

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

2061. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department has received further information requested in the case of a person (details supplied) in respect of their alleged overpayment; if arrangements have been put in place to alleviate the impact having regard to their circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28369/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person is currently repaying €30.60 per week in respect of her overpayment. Under social welfare legislation, a weekly deduction of up to 15% of the personal rate of a social welfare payment can be deducted in order to recover the debt due to my Department.

In determining a recovery plan, consideration is given to the size of the debt, the cause of the debt, previous efforts to repay the debt and the level of income and expenditure of the household.

My Department wrote to the person concerned on 11 May 2017 requesting that she provide specific documentation within 21 days in order to allow us give further consideration to the impact of the debt repayment schedule currently in place in respect of her overpayment.

Deductions were suspended pending receipt of this information. The person concerned failed to submit required documentation within the specified time frame. It is still open to the person concerned to submit information as per letter dated 11 May 2017 and my Department will take all information into consideration. In the meantime, her repayment of €30.60 will be reinstated immediately.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

2062. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a carer's allowance appeal will be determined in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28370/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the grounds of appeal of the person concerned were received in that office on 23rd May 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Payments

2063. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when one parent family allowance including arrears will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied); if immediate steps can be taken to rectify the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28377/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of a One Parent Family payment, this payment was reinstated on the 11th of May 2017 with any arrears due having been paid.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Exceptional Needs Payments

2064. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment will be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28384/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The first person concerned submitted an application for an exceptional needs payment on 29/5/17 in respect of costs associated with moving in to a new social housing dwelling. The application was refused under section 190(1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 which disqualifies persons who are in full-time employment. The partner of the person concerned is currently engaged in full-time employment.

The person concerned was advised of her right to apply for a formal review of the decision.

A request for a review of her case has not been received to-date.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

2065. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason deductions cannot be deducted from a person's weekly income when a maintenance order is in place and is not being complied with and the person is in receipt of a social welfare income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28388/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is a legal responsibility on parents, whether married or unmarried, to maintain dependent children and on spouses/civil partners to maintain each other in accordance with their means. The issue of maintenance payments is first and foremost a private matter for the persons concerned, and if they cannot resolve the matter, for the Courts through Family Law provisions. Matters relating to family law and the making of maintenance orders are proper to the Minister for Justice and Equality. The

Courts have responsibility for the determination of disputes and enforcements of maintenance orders granted.

The liability to maintain the family under social welfare legislation is separate to, and does not negate or supersede, a parent's obligation under Family Law. Where a lone parent is in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), my Department will assess if a Determination Order should issue to the other parent to contribute, either to my Department or to the other parent, to offset the cost of the OFP.

The Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976, as amended, provides for the attachment of earnings in family law cases. Deductions cannot be made from a person's weekly social welfare income where a maintenance order has been made as such income is not considered as earnings under the 1976 Act

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Code

2066. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of extending social protection supports to the self-employed and permitting such persons to opt into the existing class A structure for jobseeker's benefit paying the rate corresponding to their income level based on the last published actuarial review of the social insurance fund. [28400/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment "to introduce a PRSI scheme for the self-employed and provide a supportive tax regime for entrepreneurs and the self-employed". Significant progress was made on this commitment in Budget 2017. Self-employed contributors now have access to treatment benefits since last March and, from December next will have access to invalidity pension. This is a real and progressive advance in the provision of social protection to the self-employed.

My Department is currently examining the extension of social insurance to cover new risks and contingencies, including developing proposals on a form of jobseeker's benefit where a person's business fails or they can no longer continue working in their profession or trade. This examination will include how such additional benefits should be financed.

A major input to this examination will be the outcome of the Actuarial Review of Social Insurance Fund which is currently being undertaken by independent consultants. The Review generally will project the income and expenditure of the Fund over a 55 year period, taking into account policy, economic and demographic changes since the previous review was undertaken. The Review is also examining the potential costs in future years of extending cover for a range of benefits, including jobseeker's benefit to self-employed contributors. This examination will include the projected PRSI contribution rates which would be required to extend such cover on a revenue neutral basis, including the already announced extension of cover for invalidity pension. It is planned to publish the completed review next August.

The findings of the Review will play an important role in informing the overall debate on policy developments in relation to the Social Insurance Fund in the years ahead including the financial sustainability of the Fund given the expected demographic challenges and consideration of extending the scope of benefits for workers generally, including the self-employed.

The issue of allowing people to opt into social insurance cover was examined by the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare in its 2013 report on the extension of social insurance

coverage for the self-employed. The Group concluded that extending cover on a voluntary basis, through either an 'opt in' or 'opt out' basis, could lead to the selection of bad risks and would undermine the social solidarity and contributory principles that underline the social insurance system. The views of the Group will be further considered as part of the current examination underway by my Department.

Finally, it should be noted that one of the underlying principles of the social insurance system is that workers generally make contributions on a compulsory basis and that benefits and pensions are available, on foot of these contributions, if and when they are needed by individuals. Accordingly, the total level of benefits received by each individual over a lifetime will vary depending on the type and duration of contingencies experienced such as illness, disability, unemployment and old age. Allowing contributors to opt in and opt out of cover would mean that higher contributions would be required from those who opt in on a voluntary basis than applies under the current system.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

2067. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has not yet received a decision regarding their application for a State pension (contributory); and when a decision will be made. [28405/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for their state pension (contributory) on 26th January 2017. To ensure that the Deciding Officer can be satisfied that the record upon which a person's entitlement is based is accurate and refers to the correct individual, it is sometimes necessary to investigate certain aspects of the relevant social insurance history. This can result in a delay in processing the claim and making a decision.

The person concerned has been awarded a state pension (contributory) with effect from 16 April 2017, their 66th birthday. A letter informing the person of this decision was issued on 12 June 2017. Due arrears of pension have also issued by cheque to the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Minister.

Farm Assist Scheme Eligibility

2068. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection the approximate cost of changing farm assist means-testing rules in order that irrespective of the source of farm income the first €3,000 will be disregarded and the balance will be means tested at 50%. [28452/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Budget 2017 fully reversed the previous cuts to the Farm Assist means tests which were introduced in Budgets 2012 and 2013. The changes mean that now 70% of farm income is assessed as means, down from 100% being assessed as means (which is equivalent to a 30% income disregard). An additional annual means disregard of €254 for each of the first two children and €381 for the third and subsequent children was also introduced.

It is estimated that the cost of changing the farm assist means testing rules in order that irrespective of the source of income the first €3,000 would be disregarded and the balance would be means tested at 50% is approximately €15 million for a full year. This estimate is based on

the existing number of recipients.

However, it is envisaged that there would be an inflow of new farm assist claims if these measures were introduced. The Department cannot quantify the numbers involved and as such cannot calculate the associated additional costs. Therefore, the estimated cost of €15 million should be regarded as a minimum estimate.

Any changes to means assessment would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

2069. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the basis on which an exceptional needs payment for a person (details supplied) has been refused due to undertaking prescribed rehabilitation training by a general practitioner; if the case will be examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28476/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for an emergency needs payment in respect of the person concerned was refused under section 190(1) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 which disqualifies persons who are in full-time education. Supplementary Welfare rules also require claimants who are fit for work, to be available for and genuinely seeking work.

If the person concerned is experiencing undue financial hardship, it is open to her to call to the Community Welfare Service in Naas to further discuss her circumstances with a designated officer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

2070. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28480/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension (contributory) is one of the State pension schemes, and its rate of payment is related to PRSI contributions made over years into the Social Insurance Fund. As such, those who have paid more into the fund are most likely to be paid under that scheme. There are a number of criteria which must be satisfied to qualify for a State pension contributory. These include that the person be aged 66 or over, and that they have at least 520 paid contributions, i.e., a minimum of 10 years.

Social insurance contributions (Class S PRSI) were introduced for self-employed people on 6th April 1988. These contributions provide cover for self-employed people for long-term benefits such as State pension (contributory) and widows/widowers pension (contributory).

There was also a State pension (contributory) half-rate pension introduced for certain self-employed people which is still paid to some older pensioners, although it does not apply to new pensioners. The legislation providing for this pension came into effect from the 9th of April 1999, to provide a half-rate pension for groups who would not otherwise qualify for a contributory social welfare pension, and who did not satisfy the means test for the State pension (non-contributory). The measure was designed to benefit self-employed people who were already over 56 years of age when compulsory self-employed social insurance was introduced in 1988, who had not paid other contributions (such as voluntary contributions, or other contributions

while in employment), and who could not therefore satisfy the condition of having entered social insurance 10 years before pension age. The pension requires a minimum of only 5 years contributions, and is payable at 50% of the standard rate. The pension was seen as a reasonable response to the position of the self-employed who were in their late 50s when Class S contributions were introduced, and relative to other pensions funded by the Social Insurance Fund, it represents very good value for the contributions made .

It is worth noting that the most recently published Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund found that the self-employed achieve very good value for money from the fund.

Where a person is unable to meet the qualifying conditions for a full rate State pension (contributory), they may alternatively apply for State pension (non-contributory) which is subject to a means-test, and which is paid at up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate. That rate of payment does not include rent allowance, household benefits or fuel allowance, which would be additional payments where applicable.

It is the case, therefore, that a person in receipt of the half-rate self employed pension, in addition to having paid relatively little into the Social Insurance Fund (which funds contributory pensions), have significant additional means (such as a private pension), as otherwise they would be expected to receive the State pension (non-contributory) instead.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

2071. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding an application for qualified child allowance by persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28484/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I can confirm that the person concerned has been in receipt of Carer's Allowance (CA) with an increase of child dependant allowance for two children for several years.

The person concerned was awarded an increase for an additional child from 2 February 2017. Arrears of allowance from 2 February 2017 to 3 May 2017 were issued to the nominated bank account on 11 May 2017. The person concerned was notified of these details on 3 May 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Carer's Allowance Applications

2072. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; when it is expected a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28487/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 21 December 2016.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 30 March 2017 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for

receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. The SWI's report was received in the CA section on Monday 19 June and is currently being examined. I expect a decision will be made in the coming days and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

2073. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue regarding a review of the rate of disability allowance being paid to a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28499/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a review, the rate of disability allowance awarded to this gentleman remains unchanged. Notification of this decision issued on 19 June 2017. He was advised of his rights to seek a review or appeal this decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Insolvency Payments Scheme

2074. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason pre-1992 persons formerly employed at a company (details supplied) are not entitled to compensation regarding pension entitlements; the terms of settlements that were previously reached regarding these persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28500/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Former workers who left the service of Waterford Crystal in the early 1990s received their full pension entitlements in relation to pre-1991 service under the schemes at that point. In line with the rules of the company's pension schemes at the time and the Pensions Act, 1990, such persons had the option to choose whether to take a deferred pension in respect of full service with the company or a refund of pre 1 January 1991 contributions and a deferred pension in respect of post 1 January 1991 service.

The payments made at that time were in full and final settlement of their entitlements under the schemes and were paid in accordance with pension regulations then in force. The Department does not have information on the settlements reached in relation to pre-1991 service as these were matters between the pension scheme and its members at the time.

Subsequently, some of these individuals took a case against Waterford Crystal Limited and Irish Pensions Trust Limited and my information is that this case was settled in December 2009 on terms that were satisfactory to both parties. The Department does not have any information on settlements reached under this case.

Former workers who took a refund of contributions in respect of their pre-1991 service did not have any entitlement to a benefit under the Waterford Crystal Pension Factory and Staff Schemes at the date of their wind-up in relation to their pre-1991 service. Accordingly there are no settlements or payments due under the mediated settlement in respect of such pre-1991 service.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Data

2075. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of increasing fuel allowance by €6.50. [28511/17]

2102. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the living alone allowance to €15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28867/17]

2112. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing fuel allowance by €6.50 back to 2010 levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28989/17]

2129. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing State pension payments by €10; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28981/17]

2130. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing disability allowance by €10; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28982/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2075, 2102, 2112, 2129 and 2130 together.

The full year cost of increasing the fuel allowance by €6.50 per week, from €22.50 to €29 per week, for the duration of the fuel season is estimated to be €66 million in 2018.

The full year cost of increasing the living alone allowance by €6, from €9 to €15.00 per week, is estimated to be €62.5 million in 2018.

The full year cost of increasing all payments, other than the living alone allowance, made to individuals aged 66 or more is detailed in the table below:

Scheme	Full year cost of a €10 increase €m
State Pension Contributory	203.9
Widow/er’s or Surviving Civil Partner’s (Con) Pension – aged 66 and over	42.2
Deserted Wife’s Benefit – aged 66 and over	1.1
Death Benefit Pension – aged 66 and over	0.2
State Pension Non Contributory	50.1
Carer’s Allowance – aged 66 and over	1.2
Half Rate Carer’s Allowance – aged 66 and over	3.0
OVERALL TOTAL	301.7

The full year cost of increasing disability allowance by €10 per week is estimated to be €74.8 million in 2018.

There is an analogous social insurance payment, Invalidity Pension (€198.50 per week), which is paid to people who are permanently incapable of work (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria and a minimum number of paid qualifying PRSI contributions). Each €1 increase in the weekly rate of Invalidity Pension would cost €3.2 million in a full year.

In addition, Blind pension is available for those aged 18 to 66 who are blind or visually impaired. The cost of a €1 weekly rate increase in the Blind Pension is €0.07 million in 2017 and a full year.

It should be noted that (i) in the event of the Disability Allowance weekly rate exceeding the Invalidity Pension rate, some Invalidity pensioners (number not determinable) would transfer to the means-tested Disability Allowance scheme to avail of the higher rate on that scheme; (ii) additional costs might arise as some people in receipt of other welfare schemes might potentially apply for and qualify for Disability Allowance thereby also benefitting from a higher rate of payment than that which applies to their current scheme or (iii) offsetting savings on the Rent Supplement scheme as the additional weekly increase would reduce the level of entitlement under that scheme.

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

Child Benefit Data

2076. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of extending child benefit to all children up until the end of second level education regardless of whether or not they reach 18 years of age. [28512/17]

2101. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection the additional annual cost to extend child benefit to all children of 18 years of age and under 19 years of age that are in full time education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28825/17]

2117. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider making child benefit payable to persons with children over 18 years of age that are enrolled in secondary school reflecting the higher educational costs for persons with adolescents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29107/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2076, 2101 and 2117 together.

Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to around 626,525 families in respect of over 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

The current estimated annual cost of extending the upper age limit for payment for those persons who are 18 years and under 19 years of age and in secondary school, based on figures from the Department of Education and Skills, is over €62 million.

However, it is not possible to give the full year estimated cost of extending child benefit to all those in secondary school who are over 18 years of age as these figures are not available.

Families on low incomes can already avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

I am satisfied that these schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Given the universal nature of Child Benefit making it payable to persons with children who are 18 years of age and in secondary school would not be a targeted approach. The adoption of such a proposal would also have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Question No. 2077 answered with Question No. 2025.

One-Parent Family Payment Data

2078. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of increasing the earning disregard for the one-parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment to €146.50. [28514/17]

2084. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the earnings disregard for the one-parent family payment and the jobseeker's transition payment to €146.50, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28550/17]

2113. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the income disregard for one parent family payment and jobseeker's transition payment to €146.50; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28991/17]

2120. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will increase the earning disregard for the one parent family jobseeker's transition payment to €146.50 to allow lone parents to take up and increase working hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29113/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2078, 2084, 2113 and 2120 together.

The cost of increasing the One Parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment earnings disregard from €110 per week to €146.50 per week is set out in tabular form below:

Scheme	Increase income disregard to:	Approximate cost to the Exchequer in a full year
One Parent Family Payment	€146.50 a week	€11.1 million
Jobseeker's Transitional Payment	€146.50 a week	€4.2 million
Total		€15.3 million

The above costings are based on the number of recipients who were working and earning in excess of €110 per week on both the One-Parent Family Payment and the Jobseeker's Transi-

tional Payment as of March 2017.

The costings do not take into account potential behavioural changes, or the inflow of new entrants, which may arise from the introduction of higher income disregards. There would be additional costs on foot of these two factors, which are not possible to cost and have not been factored into the above costing of €15.3 million.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

2079. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of introducing a higher rate of the qualified child increase for all social welfare payments to families with dependent children over the age of 12 and to increase this by €5. [28515/17]

2123. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of introducing a higher rate of the qualified child increase for all social welfare payments to families with dependent children over 12 years of age and in particular, the cost of increasing same by €5 from €29.80 to €34.80; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29117/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2079 and 2123 together.

Increases for a Qualified Child (IQC) are paid as child-related supplements to most weekly social welfare payments in recognition of the need for greater incomes among benefit-dependent households with dependent children. The current full rate of payment is €29.80 per week per dependent child. The estimated expenditure on qualified child increase in 2017 is around €591million. The Department currently pays IQCs in respect of 443,635 children.

(319,153 at the full rate and 124, 482 at the half rate)

IQC payments do not of themselves constitute a specific social welfare scheme and entitlement to the appropriate primary adult payment must be established in the first instance.

Where children continue in full-time education, payment of the IQC can continue up to 22 years of age or up to the end of the academic year in which the child reaches 22 in the case of long-term payments as well as short-term payments that have been in payment for at least 156 days.

Given the complexity involved and in the time available it is currently not feasible to accurately predict the full year cost of introducing a higher rate of the qualified child increase for all social welfare payments to families with dependent children over the age of 12. My Department will examine the available data and will get back to the Deputy in due course.

Exceptional Needs Payments

2080. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of increasing the budget for the exceptional needs payment by €20 million. [28516/17]

2124. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will increase the budget for exceptional needs payments by €20 million from its current budget of €30 million up to €50 million for more exceptional needs for persons and families in low income; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29118/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2080 and 2124 together.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the 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. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and urgent needs payments (UNPs) in 2017.

An increase of €20 million in the budget allocation for ENPs and UNPs would bring the overall yearly allocation to €51.5 million. Any increase in the allocation for the scheme would have to be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

The scheme is demand led and continues to provide assistance to those with exceptional needs 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.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Jobseeker's Transitional Payment

2081. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full year estimated cost of allowing lone parents in employment whose children are between seven and 14 years of age to receive both the jobseeker's transition payment and family income supplement if they meet the qualifying criteria. [28517/17]

2085. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of allowing lone parents in employment whose children are between seven and 14 years of age to receive both the jobseeker's transition payment and family income supplement if they meet the qualifying criteria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28551/17]

2121. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider allowing lone parents in employment whose children are aged between seven and 14 years of age to receive both the jobseeker's transitional payment and family income supplement if they meet the qualifying criteria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29114/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2081, 2085 and 2121 together.

The jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) is available to lone parents (both former one-parent family payment recipients and new lone parents), who have a youngest child aged 7 to 13 years inclusive. These customers are exempt from the jobseeker's allowance conditions that require them to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work.

While it is a condition of the JST scheme that recipients must continue to parent alone, this is not a qualifying condition of the family income supplement (FIS) and so this information is not maintained for FIS recipients. From the data currently available on household composition within the FIS scheme, it is not possible to determine which FIS recipients, who are also lone parents, would satisfy the eligibility criteria to qualify for a JST payment. It is therefore not possible to provide an accurate costing of extending the payment of FIS to JST recipients.

Budget 2017 contained several measures which benefited JST recipients. These included

the 85% Christmas Bonus, which was paid to JST recipients in early December 2016 and the increase in the weekly earnings disregard for JST recipients from €90 to €110. This increase came into effect in early January 2017. JST recipients also benefited from the €5 weekly increase in social welfare payments which came into effect in March 2017.

Question No. 2082 answered with Question No. 1984.

Blind Person's Pension

2083. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person in receipt of a blind pension will automatically lose access to all or part of that pension if they marry or enter into a civil partnership; and if so, her plans to revise this policy. [28538/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Blind pension is a means-tested payment for blind and visually impaired people between the ages of 18 and 66 who are habitually resident in Ireland. In the case of a married couple or a civil partnership, a means test will take into account any income belonging to the individual and the income of their spouse or partner. As a general rule, the joint means is then divided by two to determine the individual means of the claimant.

The following items are not counted as means for blind pension:-

- Claimants own home;
- Any other payment made by this Department;
- The value of the first €20,000 of savings (for a single person) or first €40,000 (for a couple);
- Money received from a recognised charitable organisation (excluding public or local authority);
- The maintenance part of a student grant from SUSI paid to claimant, a qualified adult or child dependent(s) for certain courses;
- Income up to a certain limit from rehabilitative employment;
- Income from rehabilitative training;
- Mobility Allowance from the Department of Health; and
- Blind Welfare Allowance paid by the HSE.

It does not follow, therefore, that a person in receipt of blind pension is automatically disqualified if they marry or enter into a civil partnership. In the light of their changed circumstances, however, a full assessment of the relevant joint means will be required to determine continuing eligibility for this pension.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2084 answered with Question No. 2078.

Question No. 2085 answered with Question No. 2081.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

2086. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has examined the possibility of allowing lone parents who are in receipt of rent supplement and the one parent family payment to also be eligible for the SUSI maintenance grant; the estimated full year cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28552/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Lone parents who wish to undertake a full time third level education course can continue to receive income support from my Department irrespective of the age of the youngest child or whether or not they are in receipt of rent supplement.

For those lone parents in receipt of the One-Parent Family payment, without rent supplement, they may have access to both the SUSI maintenance grant and the SUSI free fees grant.

For those lone parents who are in receipt of rent supplement and who wish to undertake a full time course they must transition to the Back to Education Allowance to continue receiving their income support from my Department. These lone parents may also be eligible for the SUSI free fees grant. However, they are not eligible for the SUSI maintenance grant in accordance with SUSI eligibility rules, which fall under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills.

However, any changes to the rules of eligibility to the SUSI maintenance grant and the cost implications of such changes are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Review

2087. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding a claim for domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28554/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on 4th October 2016. The application was not allowed as it was considered that the evidence provided at that time did not indicate that the level of additional support required was substantially in excess of that required by children of the same age without the disability, as provided for in the qualifying conditions for the scheme. A letter issued to the person concerned on 26th January 2017 outlining the decision.

A request for a review of this decision was received on 20th February 2017, along with additional information on the child’s condition/care needs. The application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted. The outcome of this review will be notified to her as soon as it is completed. Currently, such reviews are taking approximately 18 weeks to complete.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Relocation

2088. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to transfer staff with responsibility for payroll systems currently based in Dundalk to the national shared services office in Clonskeagh, Dublin 6 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28557/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are currently no plans to transfer any of my Department's staff from payroll services in Dundalk to the National Shared Services Office in Clonskeagh.

Citizen Information Services

2089. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of the recent Citizens Information Board consultations with the MABS and citizens information services staff and companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28588/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In February 2017, the Board of Citizens Information Board (CIB) decided to change the governance model from ninety three local Citizens Information Services (CIS) and Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS) companies to a new sixteen regional board model, comprising eight CIS and eight MABS companies.

CIB has established an implementation group to progress the change. The group will have a local rolling membership element in order to harness the necessary skills and expertise as the regional structure is rolled out.

As part of its communications campaign, CIB undertook a series of 14 regional consultations during the month of May to examine and discuss some of the key aspects of implementing the new sixteen board model. The sessions were attended by 127 representatives of local company Boards and 223 representatives of management, staff and volunteers of local services. Each session was chaired by an independent facilitator. All attendees had an opportunity to raise any concerns they had about service delivery under the new model. CIB reports that the regional consultations were well received and there was considerable support for, and constructive discussion about, the change.

The regional consultation costs incurred by CIB amounted to €14,068. This includes €3,736 in respect of room hire costs at seven locations countrywide and independent facilitator costs of €10,332. Where incurred, the costs of travel and subsistence of attendees is borne by respective local CIS or MABS services, which are in turn entirely funded by CIB. Details of such costs in respect of individual companies are not readily available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

2090. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection the mechanisms available for a person to continue to dispute an overpayment from her Department once an appeal has been unsuccessful; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28615/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An overpayment of social welfare benefit or assistance is assessed as part of the statutory decision-making process provided for under the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005. When a revised decision on a social welfare entitlement is made, the claimant is notified of the outcome and the value of any overpayment assessed. In line with the statutory provisions, the person concerned is advised of the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The Appeals Officer's decision is normally final and conclusive but may be appealed to the High Court on any question of law. However, if the appellant is not satisfied with the appeal

decision, he or she may seek to have it reviewed under specific provisions of the Social Welfare (Consolidation Act) 2005 in the following circumstances - where new facts or evidence which are relevant to the original decision are brought to notice since the appeal decision was given, or, where it is considered that the appeal decision was wrong by reason of a mistake in relation to the law or the facts.

If the outcome of an appeal confirms the initial decision and the amount overpaid has been correctly determined, the Department will commence recovery of the overpayment. In making arrangements for the recovery of the sum overpaid, the Department takes into account the financial and other implication for the person concerned and will aim to avoid hardship. It is important that the person concerned works with the Department in agreeing a recovery plan that ensures the overpayment can be discharged in a manner that is acceptable to both parties. The Department has a responsibility to ensure that all overpayments are recovered in full.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit Applications

2091. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average delay in approving applicants for maternity benefit and putting them into payment from the time they apply for same; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28647/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has made good progress on processing of maternity claims and I can report that all claims relating to women who have already commenced their maternity leave have now been processed and the waiting time for these customers has been eliminated. My Department is currently processing claims where the expectant mother is commencing her maternity leave in the week commencing 19 June.

Claims are processed by reference to the 'commencement of maternity leave date' as this ensures that as many new mothers as possible have their claim awarded by the time they take their maternity leave.

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

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

2092. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all State bodies under the aegis of her Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28675/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority,

the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

Under Section 8.47 of the *Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*, a report on a State body's compliance with tax laws should be furnished each year to its relevant parent Department, confirming that the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law.

I can confirm that the Citizens Information Board has complied fully with its obligations under the *Code of Practice* for the years 2015 and 2016. The Pensions Authority has complied in respect of 2015 and has confirmed that it will do so in respect of 2016 in the coming weeks.

As all financial and budgetary matters in relation to the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal are administered directly by my Department, a report to confirm that these bodies are compliant with tax law is not required.

Wage Subsidy Scheme

2093. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 209 of 1 March 2017, the full year cost of extending the wage subsidy scheme for those in receipt of partial capacity benefit for existing and new participants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28689/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The partial capacity benefit (PCB) scheme is designed for people who are on illness benefit for at least six months or on invalidity pension and who have retained some capacity for work and wish to work. If awarded, PCB will allow them to continue to receive, in addition to their earnings from employment, a percentage of their illness benefit or invalidity pension payment while working. €14.5 million has been provided for the PCB scheme in 2017.

The wage subsidy scheme (WSS) is an employment support to private sector employers, the objective of which is to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities and thereby increase the numbers of people with disabilities participating in the open labour market. The scheme provides financial supports to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours per week under a contract of employment. Just under €26 million has been provided for the WSS scheme in 2017.

As outlined in the reply to parliamentary question number 209 of 1 March 2017, the estimated cost of extending eligibility for the WSS to employers who newly employ people in receipt of PCB is currently €2.5 million in a full year. This estimate is based on recent trends in PCB numbers and other assumptions related to the scheme conditions. As indicated in previous response, this estimated costing specifically relates to new PCB participants only, as under current scheme rules, a WSS payment can only be made where an individual is entering a new job or is in that job for less than 12 months. The 12 month time period is a feature of the scheme designed to avoid job displacement and a common feature of labour market schemes. The WSS is not the primary incentive for the retention of people with disabilities in employment; this is the role of the employee retention grant scheme (ERGS).

In the event of extending the WSS to employers of those currently employing PCB participants, it would be necessary to significantly change the focus of the WSS scheme and it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate without significant additional information on other likely effects of such a change.

As an illustration, on the basis of existing numbers of those in receipt of PCB and a number of other assumptions (namely full take-up by potential recipients, that this extension would

still be limited to private sector employers only and that PCB participants would work at least 21 hours per week), it is thought that the cost of extending the WSS in respect of current PCB recipients could be of the order of €15 million a year.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Paternity Benefit Applications

2094. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection the waiting times for processing of paternity benefit; the number of applications awaiting payment; the number of persons waiting by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28691/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The processing of paternity benefit claims by my Department is generally kept up to date, with claims processed as the fathers commence their paternity leave. However, many fathers submit their claims after they have taken the paternity leave and so can only receive their payment after the leave ends.

Claims are processed by reference to the ‘commencement of paternity leave date’ as this ensures that as many claims as possible are awarded by the time the paternity leave begins. There are currently just over 1,700 paternity benefit claims and, where all necessary information has been supplied, these claims should be processed in advance of the customer’s leave commencing date. It is not possible to provide a county by county breakdown of the claims pending.

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

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Maternity Benefit Applications

2095. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection the waiting times for processing of maternity benefit; the number of applications awaiting payment; the number waiting by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28693/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has made good progress on processing of maternity claims and I can report that all claims relating to women who have already commenced their maternity leave have now been processed and the waiting time for these customers has been eliminated. My Department is currently processing claims where the expectant mother is commencing her maternity leave in the week commencing 19 June.

Claims are processed by reference to the ‘commencement of maternity leave date’ as this ensures that as many new mothers as possible have their claim awarded by the time they take their maternity leave. There are currently just over 5,000 maternity benefit claims waiting to be processed. Where all necessary information has been supplied, these claims should be processed in advance of the customer’s leave commencing. It is not possible to provide a county by county breakdown of the claims pending.

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

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

2096. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the pilot programme that was launched in January 2016 which allowed those that had reached 62 years of age to participate on a community employment scheme on a continuous basis until they reach State pension age; the estimated full year cost of rolling this out nationwide and lowering the age to 60 years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28701/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) is a labour market activation programme which helps long-term unemployed people and other disadvantaged groups to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine. It is designed to be a temporary fixed-term activation intervention. The programme assists participants to enhance and develop their skills, competencies and confidence to enable them to compete for jobs in the open market.

The pilot initiative announced in December 2015 is still in operation. This initiative enables those aged 62 or over to extend their participation beyond the standard maximum participation limits, providing the eligibility conditions are met. Participants are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age, subject to satisfactory performance on the scheme and to annual approval by the Department. The places allocated for these participants within each individual CE scheme are limited to 7% of each scheme’s overall budgeted places. This pilot scheme is currently available nationwide.

As the Deputy will be aware, participation limits are necessary to allow for the utilisation of places amongst qualifying persons to ensure the benefits of CE are available to the widest possible number of jobseekers. The overall cost of CE reflects the number of places available and is not related to the age of the participants. The turnover of places allows the programme to maximise access to the opportunities provided by CE, such as valuable work experience, accredited training, etc.

Following the publication earlier this year of my Department’s Report - *An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme* - the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE. At the time of publication, it was also signalled that a review of the rules governing the participation of older people on schemes would take place and I expect this review to be completed in the early autumn.

In that context, my Department has been consulting with key stakeholders throughout the country during the last month and the feedback from these consultation sessions will help to inform the review and its work.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

2097. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) is in receipt of all of their entitlements; and if disability allowance payments qualify them for further benefits from her Department or any other Department. [28713/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm this gentleman is in receipt of his full entitlement regarding his disability allowance. A person who is in receipt of disability allowance will automatically qualify for the free travel pass. There may be an entitlement to the household benefit package.

The person concerned is advised to contact their local citizens information centre who will advise them if there are any other forms of assistance appropriate to their specific circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Fraud Data

2098. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons convicted of social welfare fraud in 2016; the number of these convictions that were for amounts (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28731/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Prosecutions are taken against persons who defraud the social welfare payments system and employers who fail to carry out their statutory obligations. The majority of social welfare cases are taken summarily in the District Courts, with more serious cases prosecuted by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) on indictment in the Circuit Courts.

In considering cases for legal proceedings, my Department applies the DPP guidelines for prosecutions. During 2016, 130 cases which were prosecuted by my Department under the Social Protection (Consolidation) Act 2005 were finalised by way of a conviction. Table 1 provides a summary of the value of overpayments of social welfare benefit and/or assistance in the cases.

TABLE 1: Value of overpayments in cases finalised in Courts during 2016 where prosecution were taken under the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005

Value of overpayments in cases finalised in Courts	Number of cases where a conviction was achieved
No overpayment	2
Under €1,000	0
Between €1,000 and €5,000	39
Between €5,000 and €10,000	25
Between €10,000 and €20,000	33
Between €20,000 and €50,000	19
Between €50,000 and €100,000	9
Above €100,000	3
Total	130

The reference in the table above to the two cases with no overpayments relates to the finalisation of cases involving the conviction of two employers.

The Deputy may also wish to note that a further 36 cases were finalised which resulted in the people concerned receiving the benefit of the Probation Act 1907 for social welfare related fraud offences. Table 2 provides a summary of the value of overpayments of social welfare benefit and/or assistance in these cases.

TABLE 2: Overpayments in cases finalised by way of the application of the Probation Act, 1907

Value of overpayments in cases finalised in Courts	Number of cases
Under €1,000	0
Between €1,000 and €5,000	15
Between €5,000 and €10,000	9
Between €10,000 and €20,000	8
Between €20,000 and €50,000	3
Between €50,000 and €100,000	1
Above €100,000	0
Total	36

My Department also referred 160 cases to An Garda Síochána in 2016 for investigation in relation to possible offences under the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) Acts 2001 and prosecuted by the DPP. Data in respect of overpayments on these cases will be provided separately to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Community Employment Schemes Review

2099. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a review of the community employment scheme is taking place at present; the purpose of the review; if the further curtailment of the time persons can spend on a scheme is anticipated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28803/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the publication earlier in the year of my Department's Report - *An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme* - the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on Community Employment (CE). The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme.

The changes planned will see the general qualifying age for CE for those on the live register reduced from 25 to 21 years. It will also be easier for previous participants, who have exhausted their CE entitlement, to requalify, as participation prior to the year 2007 will be disregarded. While participants between 21 and 55 years on CE will be entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment.

All CE participants age 55 and over will be able to avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. There will be an overall limit of 6 years participation from 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment). My Department has been consulting with key stakeholders throughout the country during the last month about the changes and it is planned to begin rolling them out over the coming weeks.

In addition, the Deputy should note that the current participation limits for older people on CE are being reviewed. Participation limits are necessary to allow for the utilisation of places amongst qualifying persons to ensure the benefits of CE are available to the widest possible number of jobseekers. There is no other review of CE taking place at present.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

New Communities Unit

2100. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons that the staff in the new communities unit have booked into emergency accommodation, by month in 2016 and to date in 2017. [28810/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware from previous PQ responses on this matter, the New Communities Unit (NCU) of the Department of Social Protection offers assistance to families who are primarily non-Irish, homeless and generally without recourse to any weekly income. The main focus of the unit is to ensure that families who are entitled an income maintenance payment receive same, under the terms of the relevant legislation. In addition, non-Irish homeless families have been referred to this unit directly by the Central Placement Service, operated on behalf of the four local authorities by Dublin City Council, and the staff in the NCU facilitated booking these people into emergency accommodation. This accommodation is sourced and funded by Dublin City Council under Section 10 of the Housing Act (1988). The practice, whereby staff in the NCU act as booking agents in such circumstances, was a residual one from when the NCU was based in the HSE.

Information in relation to the number of persons booked to emergency accommodation by the NCU was neither collated nor retained by the NCU. In facilitating the booking of people to emergency accommodation, the NCU contacted the accommodation provider directly to make the booking. Notification in relation to those persons accommodated in emergency accommodation is part of the reporting relationship between the accommodation provider and its funder; the NCU did not have a role in this.

The booking function was transferred to the Central Placement Service on the 22nd May 2017. The NCU has had no housing placement function for homeless persons from that date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Question No. 2101 answered with Question No. 2076.

Question No. 2102 answered with Question No. 2075.

Community Services Programme

2103. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the contribution to the community services programme to match the national minimum wage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28868/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Services Programme (CSP) provides financial support to community companies that provide revenue generating services of a social inclusion nature. Many of these companies are also funded from other sources and generate revenue from the public use of their facilities and services.

The additional programme cost involved in increasing the CSP contribution to match the minimum wage would be approximately €1.9m over a full year.

The funding provided to service providers under the CSP is expressed as a fixed annual co-funding contribution towards the costs of employing a manager or a specified number of full-time equivalent positions. The rate of CSP contribution is not aligned to the minimum wage

rate of payment.

A support fund was put in place in 2016 to assist existing funded companies who are not in a position to cover the increase in the minimum wage. Funded companies were invited to apply for this fund which operates on the basis of a reducing allocation over a 3 year period between 2016 and 2018.

I understand that approximately 84% of funded companies paid their staff above the minimum wage in 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2104 answered with Question No. 1984.

Free Travel Scheme Data

2105. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the expenditure on the free travel scheme in 2017; the estimated cost of increasing expenditure by 10%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28870/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 882,000 customers with direct eligibility. The scheme is available to all people aged over 66 living permanently in the State. To qualify for the scheme, applicants who are under age 66 must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. These are invalidity pension, blind pension, disability allowance, carer’s allowance or an equivalent social security payment from a country covered by EC Regulations or one with which Ireland has a Bilateral Social Security Agreement.

In order to maintain service at existing levels, and to facilitate new entrants/services to the scheme, funding to the free travel scheme was increased by €3 million in budget 2016.

The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2017 is €80 million. To increase the cost by 10% would require an additional €8 million bringing the total expenditure for the scheme up to €88 million.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker’s Allowance Eligibility

2106. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department has examined the feasibility of determining eligibility for jobseeker’s allowance on hours worked rather than days worked; the estimated cost of implementing same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28871/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseeker’s benefit and jobseeker’s allowance schemes provide income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2017 Estimates for the Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseekers’ schemes of €2.5 billion.

The Department does not collect data on the number of hours a jobseeker works as this information is not necessary to make a decision on an application for a jobseeker's payment. In this context the cost associated with moving the jobseeker's allowance scheme to an hours-based system, as outlined by the Deputy, cannot be ascertained.

It is recognised that a changing labour market has resulted in a move away from more traditional work patterns, resulting in an increase in the number of persons employed for less than a full week. However, any changes to the current criteria, such as moving to an hours based system, could result in significant numbers of additional individuals becoming eligible for a jobseeker's payment with substantial corresponding cost implications for the Exchequer.

Both the jobseeker's benefit and the jobseeker's allowance schemes provide significant support to individuals so that they can work up to 3 days a week and still retain access to a reduced jobseeker's payment. The current days based system can provide significant income supports to jobseekers who are casually employed. For instance an individual can earn a little over €19,300 per year and still retain a small jobseeker's allowance payment, while the equivalent threshold for an individual with a qualified adult is almost €33,300 if they are both working.

The ESRI published a paper in June 2015 entitled "Making Work Pay More: Recent Initiatives". The main findings of the ESRI paper is that the majority of jobseekers have a strong financial incentive to take up employment, with almost 8 out of 10 being at least 40% better off in employment than on welfare.

If there was a change from a days based to an hours based system, the design would have to take account of earnings. Furthermore, if an hour's based system were introduced, existing casual jobseekers could lose out if their current hours worked over three days, exceeded the new hours threshold, thereby creating a disincentive to work longer.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Review

2107. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue in relation to an application by a person (details supplied) for a domiciliary care allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28878/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 5th April 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Due to the volume of applications currently being received, it is taking approximately 18 weeks to process an application for DCA at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme

2108. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review the procedure whereby only one week's notice is given to persons on partial capacity benefit that the payment is expiring as in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28914/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a social welfare scheme which allows a person in receipt of either illness benefit, for at least six months, or invalidity pension, who may not have full capac-

ity for work, to return to employment and continue to receive a payment from my Department. Payment can continue while a person has an underlying entitlement to one of these qualifying payments.

The person concerned was in receipt of PCB from 23 November 2016 until 13 June 2017, having been previously in receipt of illness benefit from 12 June 2015 until 22 November 2016. Illness benefit is payable for a maximum of two years after which a further 13 reckonable PRSI contributions must be paid to re-qualify for payment. As the underlying entitlement to illness benefit ceased on 13 June 2017, payment of PCB also stopped from this date.

Recipients of either illness benefit or PCB are generally advised about twelve weeks before their benefit ceases and are advised at that time of other benefits for which they can apply. In this instance, the person concerned was not advised of the position until 9th June 2017 due to an administrative error. My Department sincerely regrets this error.

Given the fact that the person concerned has not currently requalified for illness benefit at this time, a claim form for Invalidity Pension, (for which they may qualify) has been issued to the person concerned. Furthermore, application forms for Medical Care and Disablement Benefit have been sent, for which they may also qualify by reason of a previous Occupational Injuries Benefit claim.

Meanwhile, should the person concerned find that their means are insufficient to meet their needs, they may qualify for assistance under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. Application for this scheme may be made to the Community Welfare Service at their local Intreo centre.

On the return of the completed application form(s) every effort will be made to have the matter expedited.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

2109. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of a domiciliary care allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28916/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received in respect of this child on the 2nd June 2017. The application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Due to the volume of applications currently being received, it is taking approximately 18 weeks to process an application for DCA at this time.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

2110. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28928/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received in respect of this child on the 20th October 2016. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the

20 June 2017

qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 2nd February 2017 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

An appeal of this decision was registered on 2nd March 2017 and additional information on the child's condition/care needs was supplied. The application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted, or alternatively, the case will be referred for consideration by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the deciding officer's review as soon as it is completed. Currently, such reviews are taking approximately 18 weeks to complete.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

2111. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to make changes to community employment schemes to disregard the time a person has been on the scheme prior to 2010 when calculating the total time a person has spent on the scheme. [28967/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the publication of my Department's Report - An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme – earlier in the year, the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions around participation on Community Employment (CE). The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme.

The changes include making it easier for previous participants who have exhausted their CE entitlement to requalify, as participation on CE prior to the year 2007 will now be disregarded (currently the year 2000 applies).

My Department has been consulting with key stakeholders throughout the country during the last month regarding the changes, the implementation of which will commence very shortly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2112 answered with Question No. 2075.

Question No. 2113 answered with Question No. 2078.

Departmental Staff Relocation

2114. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff under the remit of her Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29044/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I wish to advise the Deputy that where an application is made by a staff member to transfer to another public body the details of this application are held by the receiving public body. The numbers of Department staff seeking such transfers is not therefore readily available.

In accordance with protocols agreed centrally between the Civil and Public Services Union and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform the names of Clerical Officers seeking transfer to alternative locations in their own or another Government Department are recorded on the relevant transfer list. In this regard, each Department maintains lists in respect of their own locations. The lists reflect the current position and are not maintained in a way that allows historical details to be reported. It should also be noted that a single staff member may appear on many different transfer lists, and so the total number of applications will be greater than the number of staff concerned. The Department also maintains informal transfer lists for staff at Executive Officer and Higher Executive Officer grades, but the number of applications on these lists is not readily available. The estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocates on foot of a transfer is not recorded but would generally only involve some potential training costs, given that the staff member is transferring to fill an existing vacancy.

The attached table shows the number of applications from Clerical Officers currently recorded on the transfer lists for the Department's offices outside Dublin. Transfers are deemed to be voluntary moves which do not attract payment of any removal or travel expenses.

Table showing the number of applications from Clerical Officers seeking a transfer to offices of the Department of Social Protection offices which are outside Dublin

Location	No. of applicants	Location	No. of applicants
Achill	147	Kilkenny	54
Arklow	29	Killarney	25
Athlone	74	Kilrush	2
Athy	9	Letterkenny	47
Ballina	238	Limerick	12
Ballinasloe	215	Listowel	20
Bandon	8	Longford	8
Bantry	12	Loughrea	24
Belmullet	147	Lucan	4
Birr	6	Malahide	2
Bray	9	Mallow	142
Buncrana	2	Manorhamilton	69
Cahiriveen	21	Monaghan	81
Carlow	63	Mullingar	125
Carrick-on-Suir	3	Naas	14
Carrigaline	13	Navan	43
Castlebar	246	Nenagh	111
Cavan	29	New Ross	2
Carrick-on-Shannon	54	Newbridge	49
Clifden	26	Newcastlewest	44
Clonakilty	9	Portlaoise	146
Clonmel	31	Roscommon	191
Cobh	44	Skibbereen	9
Cork	14	Sligo	26
Donegal Town	93	Templemore	3
Drogheda	79	Thurles	58

Location	No. of applicants	Location	No. of applicants
Dundalk	15	Tipperary	11
Dunfanaghy	75	Tralee	52
Dungarvan	3	Trim	5
Dungloe	103	Tuam	8
Edenderry	12	Tubbercurry	10
Ennis	84	Tullamore	101
Enniscorthy	118	Waterford	8
Fermoy	9	Westport	148
Galway	38	Wexford	25
Kells	3	Wicklow	8
Kenmare	50	Youghal	6

Jobseeker's Benefit

2115. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to honour the commitment given by her predecessor concerning the review of part time and seasonal workers entitlements to social protection payments in view of the delay in issuing the report which was due in March or April 2017, but has yet to be published; when same will be made available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29065/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An Taoiseach, in his previous role as Minister for Social Protection, gave a commitment at Dáil report stage of the Social Welfare Bill 2016 that he would ask his officials to examine the issue of jobseeker's benefit and the treatment of part-time and seasonal workers, including those categorised as having subsidiary employment. As a result, my Department is currently undertaking a report in relation to the subsidiary employment daily earnings limit of €12.70 and to the duration of jobseeker's benefit.

My intention is to present these reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection for its consideration shortly. I am committed to producing the reports as quickly as possible so that they can inform Budget 2018 discussions.

Fuel Allowance Payments

2116. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of increasing the rate of fuel allowance by €6.50 which would restore purchasing power parity of 2010 levels; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29106/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to low income households, at an estimated cost of €229 million in 2017. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays the household benefits package at an estimated cost of €232 million in 2017. €177 million of this cost relates to the electricity or gas allowance element of the household benefits package.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources – this may include exceptional heating costs.

Given the 2017 estimated cost of fuel allowance is €229 million based on a weekly fuel allowance rate of €22.50, the estimated cost of increasing the fuel allowance by €6.50 a week to €29.00 per week would be expected to be over €66 million.

This would amount to an increase of 28.9% on the current rate which was most recently increased last year by 12.5%. I am advised that CPI inflation in the 7 years between May 2010 and May 2017 (the most recent figures available) has amounted to 5.2%.

Any decision to increase the fuel allowance payment would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the Energy Affordability Strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support towards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2117 answered with Question No. 2076.

Question No. 2118 answered with Question No. 2025.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

2119. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will reverse the decision to means test income derived from part time work for those in receipt of the back to education allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29112/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions.

The BTEA is not intended as an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third-level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department.

To qualify for BTEA, a person must be in receipt of one of the following social welfare payments for a minimum period - 3 months if pursuing a second level course, or 9 months if pursuing a third level course.

- Jobseekers Allowance or Jobseekers Benefit;
- One-parent Family Payment;
- Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Contributory) Pension;
- Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension;

- Disability Allowance;
- Carer's Allowance
- Deserted Wife's Benefit or Allowance;
- Blind Pension;
- Invalidity Pension;
- Illness Benefit (2 years) for both second and third level courses;
- Incapacity Supplement (based on a life Disablement Pension).

From the start of 2016/17 academic year, all new BTEA participants who engage in part-time work while on the Allowance are being means assessed in accordance with the primary payment. This measure was introduced to ensure equity, from a means perspective, between BTEA recipients and recipients of the primary payment upon which their entitlement to the Allowance is based. I have no plans to change these procedures.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2120 answered with Question No. 2078.

Question No. 2121 answered with Question No. 2081.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

2122. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address the anomaly by which lone parents in receipt of rent supplement and the one parent family payment or jobseeker's transition payment that want to take up education or training are not eligible for SUSI maintenance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29116/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA), operated by my Department, is designed to support second-chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions.

The BTEA is not intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third-level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department.

The Deputy should note that applicants approved for BTEA (or VTOS for those pursuing post-leaving certificate courses) are not eligible for the student support grants operated by SUSI. BTEA participants are, however, eligible for support to offset the cost of the student registration fee, including other fees payable to access courses, if the BTEA participant satisfies the eligibility criteria for both.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 2123 answered with Question No. 2079.

Question No. 2124 answered with Question No. 2080.

Social Welfare Eligibility

2125. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to an article (details supplied), if the right to full social welfare payments while residing in direct provision will also be granted to other nationalities with status; if not, if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this could be classified as discrimination within the asylum process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28549/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The decision of the Social Welfare Appeals Office is being examined in the Department to determine, among other things, if it has wider application.

Once this examination is complete the Department will arrange to implement the necessary changes, if any, to arrangements in respect of other refugees with status.

Maternity Benefit

2126. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Social Protection the first and full year cost of increasing paid maternity leave by 1 to 16 weeks respectively. [28590/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated additional cost of extending the duration of maternity benefit is approximately €10 million for each extra week. The table below estimates the additional cost of increasing the duration of maternity benefit above its current 26 week duration at the current weekly rate of €235.

These estimates are based on the cost for a full year and assume that any increase in duration is implemented from the beginning of the year. The cost for the first year would depend on the implementation date that the increase in duration would take effect. This cost would be proportional to the full year cost.

Estimated annual cost of increasing the duration of maternity benefit based on 2017 rates

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
1	10
2	20
3	30
4	40
5	50
6	60
7	70
8	80
9	90
10	100
11	110
12	120
13	130

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
14	140
15	150
16	160

It should be noted that this costing is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2017. It should also be noted that there are also costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

Paternity Benefit

2127. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Social Protection the first and full year cost of increasing paid paternity leave by 1 to 16 weeks respectively. [28591/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 which was enacted in July 2016 introduced a new scheme of paternity leave and an associated social welfare payment of paternity benefit from the 1st September 2016.

Approximately 12,750 paternity benefit claims have been awarded since the commencement of the scheme in September. This would indicate a take up of around approximately 19,000 in a full year. However there were approximately 7,500 paternity benefit claims awarded in the first four months of this year. This would indicate a take up of approximately 22,500 in a full year. However neither figure takes account of the fact that fathers can take their paternity leave up to 6 months after their child is born. For example, fathers whose child was born on the 28th February 2017 can take their leave at any time up to 1st September 2017. As such, current figures for paternity benefit claims awarded do not include fathers who will apply and take their leave in the remaining months available to them.

Given the flexibility afforded to fathers and the scheme cycle it will be 18 months from the commencement of the scheme before the Department will have an accurate figure for the take-up of paternity benefit in a full year. The estimates below are based on this proviso.

The estimated additional cost of extending the duration of paternity benefit is approximately €5.5 million for each extra week. The table below estimates the additional cost of increasing the duration of paternity benefit above its current 2 week duration at the current weekly rate of €235.

Estimated annual cost of increasing the duration of Paternity Benefit based on 2017 rates

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
1	5.5
2	11.0
3	16.5
4	22.0
5	27.5
6	33.0
7	38.5
8	44.0

No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
9	49.5
10	55.0
11	60.5
12	66.0
13	71.5
14	77.0
15	82.5
16	88.0

These estimates are based on the cost for a full year and assume that any increase in duration is implemented from the beginning of the year. The cost in the first year would depend on the implementation date that the increase in duration would take effect. This cost would be proportional to the full year cost.

It should be noted that this costing is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2017. It should also be noted that there are also costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

Job Creation

2128. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the cost of incentivising job creation via headcount growth (details supplied), in tabular form. [28732/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The JobsPlus programme operated by my Department replaced the previous PRSI exemption scheme and incentivises job creation by providing subsidies paid to employers who offer full-time work of over 30 hours per week and spanning at least a 4 day week to targeted jobseekers.

In the case of a jobseeker out of the labour market for over 24 months, a subsidy of €10,000 is paid to the employer over two years, in respect of each such additional employee engaged. A subsidy of €7,500 over two years is available to employers who recruit a jobseeker who is between 12 and 24 months unemployed. Payment is made directly to the employer on a monthly basis.

In 2015, eligibility was broadened to include young jobseekers (under 25 years) unemployed for four months or more in the previous 6 months and jobseekers transitioning from a one parent family payment. A subsidy of €7,500 is payable in both instances. This incentive was further extended in 2016 to include Programme Refugees in receipt of jobseeker's allowance and no qualifying period applies.

JobsPlus is available to all employers offering full time work to additional new employees in the private sector (including commercial semi-state) as well as the community, not-for-profit and voluntary sectors. There is no limit on the number of new recruits per employer. Start-up employers may also avail of the scheme where the business has commenced operations. In May 2017, the Department made payments totalling over €2.4 million to 3,816 employers in respect of 5,077 employees.

It is not clear if the Deputy is proposing that the PRSI exemption scheme outlined would apply in respect of all new additional employees recruited by employers, including new employees who were not registered with my Department as jobseekers or who were not on an

analogous welfare payment. If this is the case, it is not possible to quantify the reduction in PRSI income that would arise but it is likely that there would be significant deadweight costs.

The current JobsPlus scheme offers a significant incentive to recruit long-term jobseekers. For example, the €10,000 JobsPlus payment outlined above is more financially advantageous to an employer than an Employer PRSI exemption over two years where an employee's annual earnings are less than €46,400. The equivalent annual earnings in respect of the €7,500 payment is just under €35,000.

Questions Nos. 2129 and 2130 answered with Question No. 2075.

Employment Support Services

2131. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons that have been referred to a company (details supplied) each year since it started delivering JobPath programmes on behalf of her Department; the number of persons that have progressed to full and part time employment within 12 weeks and 26 weeks following completion of their JobPath course, by timeframe and age group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [26988/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. The service was rolled out on a phased basis over the period mid-2015 to July 2016. To date circa 51,000 jobseekers have commenced their engagement period with Seetec. The figures per year are shown in the table below –

Referral Year	Number
2015	2,777
2016	32,979
2017	14,970
Total	50,726

Jobseekers may be supported through the service for up to 30 months: under the service jobseekers have access to a personal adviser (PA) who works with them potentially over two phases.

During the first phase, of 12 months duration, the PA provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. It should be noted that the aim of the JobPath service is to find sustainable employment for clients during this phase. The second phase only starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work (during phase one). During this phase the PA continues to work with the jobseeker for a further period of at least three months, and up to 12 months, providing in employment supports. In addition to the two phases jobseekers may also undertake training while with the service and this may extend the period the jobseeker is supported through the service for up to a further 6 months.

Jobseekers who find employment after completing their engagement period (phase one) with the Jobpath service are not counted towards the service provider's outcomes and the providers cannot claim fees in respect of these clients. As such, the Department does not specifically record the numbers of clients to find work after completing their engagement period with the JobPath service.

It is intended that a full econometric evaluation of the service will commence towards the

end of 2017. My Department has however commenced publishing a performance report for the service on a quarterly basis. The most recent report was published on the Department's website last week and can be accessed at -

http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath_Performance_Report2017.pdf.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance

2132. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department is conducting a review regarding the appropriate type of contribution payable by employees of Coillte which is presently the subject of an appeal (details supplied) with the Chief Appeals Officer; the status of this review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28940/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Scope insurability section in the Department of Social Protection makes statutory decisions on insurability of employment under the Social Welfare Act. Employers, employees and the self-employed may apply to Scope for an investigation of an employment status and a determination of the correct class of PRSI. Scope decisions are based on all available evidence, including a report from a social welfare inspector where appropriate, and the case law from previous court judgements.

Coillte has appealed the decision of a deciding officer in Scope section concerning the insurability of employment of 39 employees in Coillte, to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The Social Welfare Appeals office performs its statutory functions independently of the Minister for Employment and Social Protection and it would be inappropriate to comment on the matter under appeal.

Separately, the Department has received a submission from Coillte in respect to one aspect of the cases considered by Scope section. The Department has sought legal advice on the submission and will revert to Coillte and, if necessary, the employees concerned in due course.

Question No. 2133 answered with Question No. 1984.

Question No. 2134 answered with Question No. 2025.

State Bodies Data

2135. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of staff employed in her Department and in each State agency under the aegis of her Department, by county, in tabular form. [29256/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The number of permanent staff employed by my Department and its agencies (Pensions Authority and Citizen's Information Board) by county at 1 June 2017 is set out in the table below:

Department of Social Protection

Staff Serving by County

COUNTY	POSTS	PEOPLE
Carlow	54.70	58

COUNTY	POSTS	PEOPLE
Cavan	48.74	54
Clare	81.88	88
Cork	372.29	401
Donegal	460.60	486
Dublin	2069.60	2204
Galway	180.91	193
Kerry	134.07	144
Kildare	86.24	90
Kilkenny	58.20	62
Laois	36.76	39
Leitrim	187.22	197
Limerick	186.13	190
Longford	415.64	434
Louth	226.71	248
Mayo	116.22	123
Meath	57.10	58
Monaghan	43.83	47
Offaly	72.06	75
Roscommon	81.16	88
Sligo	543.07	585
Tipperary	105.80	111
Waterford	163.62	177
Westmeath	100.80	111
Wexford	88.20	93
Wicklow	77.55	81
Grand Total	6049.11	6437

In addition to the above, there are 463 Temporary Clerical Officers currently employed in my Department to cover the Shorter Working Year Scheme, long term absences, and to administer the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Scheme and the Public Service Card.

Citizens Information Board

Staff Serving by County

County	Staff Numbers
Dublin	44
Wexford	1
Cork	7
Limerick	3
Galway	3
Mayo	1
Sligo	2
Donegal	1
Louth	2
Offaly	1
Cavan	1
Kilkenny	6
Waterford	1
TOTAL	73

Pensions Authority

Staff Serving by County

COUNTY	POSTS	PEOPLE
Dublin	53.50	54

All staff in the Pensions Authority are based in Dublin.

Motor Tax

2136. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will end the penalising of persons that can only afford to pay car tax in three month or six month instalments, in view of the fact that the annual price for car tax if paid over four three month periods is approximately 10% more expensive than paying car tax in one annual instalment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26520/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Motor tax is payable on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates applicable for the half-yearly and quarterly options are 55.5% and 28.25% of the annual charge, respectively. These relativities have remained generally consistent since the 1960's.

The differential takes account of the extra workload for staff in motor tax offices and the Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which operates the online motor tax system, as well as the resultant administrative costs and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. Each quarterly renewal of motor tax follows the same administrative procedures as the annual renewal process. Consequently, renewing on a quarterly basis generates four times the workload of an annual renewal for the equivalent period.

Based on the number of transactions in 2016, the annual cost of abolishing the additional charge associated with the half-yearly and quarterly options would be in the order of €55.3m. The loss of income that would arise from changing these arrangements would have a negative impact on the total collected via motor tax and would have to be borne elsewhere in the motor tax system or through the taxation system generally; any such change could, therefore, only be considered in a Budgetary context.

I have no plans currently to review the basis for paying motor tax on a half-yearly or quarterly basis.

Local Government Reform

2137. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the annual savings achieved each year since the implementation of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 which allowed for the abolition of town and borough councils, in tabular form. [26544/17]

2138. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the annual savings achieved each year for each town council abolished or amalgamated under the Local Government Reform Act 2014. [26545/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2137 and 2138 together.

The Government's Action Programme for Effective Local Government indicated that it would be reasonable to project a target for overall savings in the range €15 to €20 million per annum relative to 2010 expenditure figures as potentially achievable from changes in sub-county governance when the new arrangements bedded down. Savings arose from the elimination of parallel structures including on costs associated with supporting 80 separate corporate organisations and the related duplication of functions and processes with the county council, and with the achievement of greater economies of scale and efficiencies within counties.

However, it is not valid to measure the outcome of mergers solely in terms of expenditure reduction, because the gains from local authority unification can be applied and reflected in various ways. For example, resources previously absorbed in administrative processes and services which are freed up by merger can, instead, be used for more productive purposes such as improved services and promotion of economic development. Similarly, cost savings achieved could be applied to enhancing services. These are matters for decision by the elected council in each case. Any reorganisation of this scale involves cost (for example IT systems) but these are largely one-off and will be heavily outweighed by lasting savings and benefits.

Moreover, comparison of costs between years would be distorted by significant changes that have occurred in local authority functions and activities separately from the structural reorganisation process. For example, local authorities have taken on significant new functions in the areas of enterprise, economic development and community development, and levels of activity have increased significantly in areas such as housing and planning. It is not possible, therefore, to provide meaningful data in the form requested.

Pyrite Issues

2139. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to problems with the traffic light system used to assess homes affected by pyrite by the Pyrite Resolution Board; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that home owners of homes assessed as amber are unable to sell their homes in view of the fact banks will not give mortgages for pyrite affected homes and buyers are reluctant to purchase pyrite affected homes; his plans to resolve this problem; the position regarding the review of the scheme undertaken by the National Standards Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26596/17]

2140. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will examine a case concerning persons (details supplied) that have been unable to sell their pyrite affected home after it was assessed as amber by the Pyrite Resolution Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26597/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2139 and 2140 together.

The Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) recommended a categorisation system as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works in recognition of the expensive and intrusive nature of pyrite remediation and the unpredictability of pyritic heave. The independent Pyrite Panel was clear in its view that only dwellings with significant damage due to pyritic heave (i.e. red category) should be remediated and that it would be unreasonable to expect dwellings not exhibiting such damage to be remediated. Dwellings which have no significant damage but

have reactive pyrite in the hardcore material (i.e. amber category) should be monitored and only remediated if they display significant damage due to pyritic heave. This remains the position with regard to dwellings, which do not display significant pyritic damage.

In response to this recommendation, I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and Categorisation was published by the National Standards Authority of Ireland in late January 2013, and provides the means by which dwellings, which may be affected by pyrite can be tested and categorised. In broad terms, the national standard sets out a two-step process to facilitate the testing and categorisation of dwellings.

The first step requires that a Building Condition Assessment be carried out; this comprises a desktop study and a visual non-invasive internal and external inspection of a dwelling to establish the presence or absence of visible damage that is consistent with pyritic heave and to quantify the extent and significance of such damage in that dwelling. Damage ratings of 0, 1 or 2 can be assigned to a dwelling under this process.

The second step involves the sampling and testing of the sub-floor hardcore material and is informed by the assignment of the Damage Condition Rating under the Building Condition Assessment process. At the conclusion of this two-step process, buildings may be categorised under I.S. 398-1:2013 into four categories which are broadly consistent with the traffic light system that was used by the Pyrite Panel as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme by the Pyrite Resolution Board for certain dwellings affected by significant pyrite damage. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme, which is available on the Board’s website (www.pyriteboard.ie).

The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013. It is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. There are no proposals to amend the eligibility criteria.

In late 2015, the National Standards Authority of Ireland commenced a review of I.S. 398-1:2013 in the light of practical experience since the standard was first introduced in January 2013. The standard is being updated and revised to reflect the on-site experiences and evidence gathered by technical experts, such as engineers, geologists, professionals providing sampling and testing services and other technical experts, who have been using the standard over the past four years. A public consultation on the revision of I.S. 398-1:2013, took place in late 2016. My Department understands that it is anticipated that the revised standard will be published later this year.

Local Authority Housing

2141. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the monthly totals of housing units for which local authorities have received planning permission commencement notices in each of the past 12 months, by local authority, in tabular form. [26603/17]

2142. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the monthly totals of housing units for which local authorities have received

certificates of compliance on completion in each of the past 12 months, by local authority, in tabular form. [26604/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2141 and 2142 together.

It is important to note that the building control function of each Local Authority pursuant to the Building Control Act 1990, as amended, is separate and distinct from the planning function of each Local Authority under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Local Authorities in their capacity as Building Control Authorities are required to keep certain information pertaining to building works that come under the Building Control Regulations 1997-2015 on a statutory register, including particulars in relation to Commencement Notices and Certificates of Compliance on Completion. The Building Control Management System (BCMS) is centrally hosted by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) on behalf of the 31 Local Authorities and has enabled this information to be hosted on a central nationwide register, readily available and updated quarterly at <https://www.localgov.ie/en/link-type/bcms> .

The purpose of the BCMS is as an IT enabler, set up to facilitate building control authorities, building owners, builders and construction professionals in discharging their separate responsibilities under the Building Control Act 1990. The system provides a common platform for clear and consistent administration of building control matters across the local authority sector.

My Department is not involved in the day to day operation of this system. However, it collates and publishes a range of housing and planning statistics, including information on Commencement Notices, which are available on the Department's website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-starts> .

Protected Disclosures

2143. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 213 of 28 March 2017, if he is in receipt of a report (details supplied) from Galway city council; and the process he plans to follow and the timeframe involved. [26625/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 1 June 2017, my Department received a detailed report from the Chief Executive of Galway City Council into the matters raised in the submission concerned made with reference to the Protected Disclosures Act 2014.

The Department will require a period of time - estimated at 6 weeks from the date of receipt of the report - to consider its contents and appropriate next steps.

The correspondent was informed of this course of action on 2 June.

Water and Sewerage Schemes

2144. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the rural water programme 2016 to 2018 is open to applications from group sewerage schemes; if not, the expected date it is envisaged group water projects can apply for funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26656/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018 was developed through a working group of key stakeholders involving local authorities, the Water Services Transition Office, Irish Water, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes as well as my Department. The programme provides for the funding of demonstration Group Sewerage Schemes, through Measure 4(d), where clustering of households on individual septic tanks is not a viable option, particularly from an environmental perspective.

Local authorities were invited in January 2016 to submit bids under the programme. The invitation envisaged no more than two demonstration group sewerage projects being brought forward under the measure in any one year of the three year programme. The demonstration projects will allow my Department, over the course of the programme, to determine the appropriate enduring funding levels and relationship with the current grant scheme.

As new demonstration group sewerage schemes have been identified for the duration of the programme, and as only two demonstration projects can be advanced in any given year, my Department does not propose to modify the programme at this point. My Department will give consideration to the scope of the measure under the programme from 2019 onwards having regard to the implementation of the existing Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018. My Department will also be giving wider consideration to the Report of the Joint Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services as it relates to the rural water programme.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

2145. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when funding will be allocated to a group sewage scheme (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26657/17]

2146. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when funding will be allocated to a group sewage scheme (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26658/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2145 and 2146 together.

My Department's new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016 - 2018 includes funding of group sewerage schemes, through Measure 4(d), where clustering of households on individual septic tanks is not a viable option, particularly from an environmental perspective.

Local authorities were invited in January 2016 to submit bids under the programme. The invitation envisaged no more than two demonstration group sewerage schemes being brought forward under the measure in any one year of the three year programme. The demonstration project will allow my Department, over the course of the programme, to determine the appropriate enduring funding levels and relationship with the current grant scheme. Proposed Group Sewerage Schemes for both Cloonturk and Fawn were included by Leitrim County Council in its bids under the measure. In total, 83 bids were received from 17 local authorities requesting funding under this measure.

An Expert Panel was convened by my Department to examine the 2016 bids from local authorities for projects under a number of the programme's measures, including measure 4(d) and to make recommendations to the Department on funding. The Panel recommended a priority list of demonstration schemes under this measure to my Department which accepted the recommendations in full when approving the rural water allocations for 2016. The priority list

recommended by the Panel did not include the proposed Cloonturk and Fawn schemes.

As only two demonstration projects can be advanced in any given year and a priority list of new demonstration group sewerage schemes has already been identified for the duration of the programme, there is currently no scope for any additional schemes.

A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under the programme is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues>.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

2147. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the funding applications of Meath county council for social housing developments at locations (details supplied) in County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26665/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has recently received proposals from Meath County Council for the funding of social housing developments in the locations concerned. These proposals are currently being assessed by my Department's technical staff, who will be in contact with Meath County Council on the matter shortly.

Local Authority Staff

2148. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when it is envisaged that Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas from County Cork will meet with the CEO of Cork county council under section 237A of the Local Government Act 2001. [26676/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Local Government Act 2001 (Section 237A) Regulations 2003 set out statutory provisions for local authorities and their dealings with members of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Section 12 of the Regulations requires that the Chief Executive, together with the Cathaoirleach, of each local authority meets at least annually with local Oireachtas members as a group. This provision aims to facilitate good communication and provide an opportunity for local authorities to update Oireachtas members, in their role as public representatives, on local developments.

My Department wrote to each Chief Executive in December 2016 to request that they review the arrangements in place for engaging with Oireachtas members so as to ensure that the obligations under the Regulations, including those related to communications and timeframes, are being complied with in a satisfactory manner.

Local authorities are independent statutory bodies in the performance of their functions. As such, the scheduling of the annual meeting with Oireachtas members is the responsibility of the relevant local authority, in this case Cork County Council.

2149. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households per county which are in receipt of the housing assistance payment; the number of landlords and agents currently participating in the HAP scheme per county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26687/17]

2150. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of landlords and agents per county that have rejected housing assistance payment tenancies since the scheme's introduction but that previously accepted tenants in receipt of rent supplement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26688/17]

2151. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to incidents whereby landlords have expressed an unwillingness and reluctance to participate in the housing assistance payment scheme due to the requirements and obligations placed on them as part of the programme; the steps he is taking to ensure that persons in receipt of HAP are not being unfairly discriminated against by landlords; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26689/17]

2152. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the costs incurred by his Department to date in the training of staff; the costs incurred in the setting up of office operations as part of the housing assistance payment shared services centre in Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26690/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2149 to 2152, inclusive, together.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 22,000 households in receipt of HAP, including 7,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement. There are currently more than 17,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the HAP scheme.

My Department publishes a breakdown of the additional households supported by HAP by each local authority every quarter. This breakdown also includes the number of Rent Supplement transfers and new applicants. A breakdown of the number of households supported in each local authority area at the end of Q1 2017 is available on my Department's website. Further details can be found at the following weblink: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

In relation to the number of landlords and agents currently participating in the scheme, my Department does not collate this data. However, the HAP Shared Services Centre makes HAP payments to over 17,000 separate landlords and agents who may have more than one property under the scheme.

Under the HAP scheme, there are terms and conditions for both a HAP supported tenant and a landlord, in order for HAP to be paid. Both parties also have to provide information in order for a local authority to process an application for HAP. The legislative basis for HAP is provided in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. As HAP support is funded by the Exchequer, with €153m provided for in 2017, it is important that the scheme's terms and conditions operate to ensure that this money is paid to the legitimate owner of the dwelling concerned; that the dwelling concerned meets the legislative requirements governing the minimum standards for rented accommodation (which all landlords have a legal obligation to ensure); and that the landlord is fulfilling their obligations under Revenue's legislation.

HAP provides landlords with many advantages including that the landlord does not have to

collect rent, payments are made electronically directly to the landlords on the tenant's behalf, landlords who rent to tenants in receipt of HAP may avail of increased tax relief and changes in a tenant's employment circumstances do not affect the HAP payments made to the landlord. With more than 300 new households, landlords and agents engaging with the scheme each week, including those transferring from Rent Supplement, it is clear that HAP is operating well for both landlords and tenants.

A landlord or an agent acting on behalf of a landlord is not legally obliged to enter into a tenancy agreement with a HAP recipient. However, since 1 January 2016, a person cannot be discriminated against when renting because they are in receipt of certain payments, including HAP, so landlords can no longer state when advertising accommodation that HAP is not accepted. If a person feels that they have been discriminated against by a landlord or their agent, they can make a complaint under the Equal Status Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission. Further information is available on the Commission's website, <https://www.workplacere-lations.ie> .

Details on the number of landlords and agents that have rejected HAP supported tenancies is not available in my Department.

With regards to costs incurred by my Department to date in the training of staff, these costs are not broken down in this way and are not available. However, my Department, together with the HAP Shared Service Centre and the Housing Agency, undertook an extensive training programme for local authorities, which has proven an important contributing factor to the successful rollout of the scheme. In terms of the costs incurred in the setting up of the office operations as part of the HAP Shared Service Centre in Limerick, the total cost since the scheme commenced to date is €3.124m. This includes staff costs, investment costs and other operational funding requirements. The Centre provides an efficient and effective transactional service on behalf of every local authority in the country, and the investment made represents good value for money.

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

Local Authority Funding

2153. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the year in which the needs and resources model was adopted for the purposes of the distribution of the general purposes grants to local authorities; if in deciding that no local authority would lose financially in the context of moving from general purposes grant to LPT, if the needs and resources of all local authorities were reassessed; if not, the way in which new needs are accommodated; his plans to carry out a general assessment of needs and resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26694/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Needs and Resources Model was developed and first used in 2000 to assist in the determination of the allocation of General Purpose Grants (GPGs) to local authorities from the Local Government Fund. The aim of the model was to bring about equalisation between local authorities over time so that each would have sufficient resources, from a combination of central grants and local income, to provide a reasonable level of services to their customers.

Local authorities' cost and income bases vary significantly from one another as a result of their size, population, public service demands, infrastructure and income sources, which means calculating an appropriate distribution of these grants has been complex. A number of factors were taken into account as relevant, including the overall funding available for local authorities, the estimated cost to each authority of providing a reasonable level of service to their customers, the income each authority should generate from local sources and the necessity to provide each authority with a baseline allocation to support its financial stability.

Local retention of Local Property Tax (LPT) began in 2015 and is now established as an essential source of funding for the local government sector, which reduces reliance on central funding. In accordance with decisions taken by Government regarding the distribution of LPT funding, every local authority has a minimum level of funding available to it known as the LPT baseline. The LPT funding baseline in 2017 is linked to previous GPG amounts and Pension Related Deductions retained by authorities in 2014.

The funding system that applies to local authorities is a complex one, as authorities derive their income from a variety of sources including commercial rates, charges for goods and services and funding from Central Government. Central Government funding of local authorities similarly presents a complex picture, with transfers, both current and capital, coming from a range of Departments and Offices, for a variety of purposes. Some streams of funding are delivered directly from funding departments to local authorities, while others are routed through departmental agencies.

Notwithstanding the constrained fiscal situation generally, I am satisfied that the current overall funding model enables local authorities to support an appropriate level of service provision across the State. My Department keeps the overall funding system under review and works with all local authorities to ensure the local government sector can meet existing and emerging challenges.

Matters relating to LPT allocation methods and equalisation for future years will be reviewed as necessary and appropriate.

Fire Safety

2154. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of his Department's report into the fire at Milford Manor, Newbridge, County Kildare; the timeframe for finishing the report; the expected recommendations; and the publication date of same. [26709/17]

2212. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the report into fire safety at a location (details supplied) undertaken by his department in September 2015 will be completed; and the timeframe for publishing same. [27738/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2154 and 2212 together.

In July 2015, the then Minister directed that a review be undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application, in the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise. A steering group was convened to oversee the review.

The independent fire safety expert has completed his review and a report on the matter has

been received by my Department. The report remains under consideration pending clarification of a number of issues at which point it is intended that the arrangements necessary for publication will be made.

Planning Issues

2155. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there are planning guidelines in place relating to the development of crematoriums here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26715/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The establishment and operation of crematoria are subject to controls under planning, environmental protection and air pollution legislation.

There are no planning guidelines related specifically to the development of crematoria.

Land Availability

2156. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has access to a register of land banks in the greater Dublin area; the type of companies that hold these land banks; his plans to create such a register if one does not exist in order to tackle the deficit in land available for residential development in that area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26721/17]

2172. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the workings and expected yield of a reported levy of 3% of land value which will be included in budget 2018. [27120/17]

2190. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has examined proposals to further sanction the non-use or hoarding of residentially zoned land; his views on whether the vacant site levy is unlikely to be an effective sanction against land hoarding; and his further views on whether the process of identifying and entering vacant sites onto the vacant site registrar is too cumbersome and unlikely to be effective as demonstrated by the low number of vacant properties that have been entered onto these registers to date. [27317/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2156, 2172 and 2190 together.

The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites, exceeding 0.5 hectares in area - with reduced or zero rates of levy applying in specific circumstances – which, in the planning authority's opinion, were vacant or idle

in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. The 3% rate of vacant site levy is consistent with the rate applied to derelict sites under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and is considered reasonable, without being over-punitive, for the purposes of incentivising the activation of such sites for residential or regeneration purposes.

It is also worth noting that all levies due on an individual site will remain a charge on the land concerned until all outstanding levies due are paid. Accordingly, under the vacant site levy provisions, there will be a cumulative effect associated with not activating a site for development purposes for each year that a site remains vacant or idle.

The proceeds of the levy raised on vacant sites will be used by planning authorities for the provision of housing and urban regeneration development in the local area in which vacant sites are located. No more than 10% of the levy monies received by planning authorities may be used on their collection and administration costs. At this time, it is not possible to provide an estimate of the annual levies that may be raised by planning authorities in the implementation of the levy.

My Department issued general guidance to planning authorities on the implementation of the vacant site levy in July 2016, by way of Circular Letter PL 7/2016, entitled Implementation of the Vacant Site Levy, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_072016_guidance_on_implementation_of_the_vacant_site_levy.pdf

Planning authorities are presently engaging in the necessary preparatory work, prior to the application of the levy with effect from January 2019 in respect of sites identified on the register in 2018. As required under the Act, this includes the identification of specific vacant sites for entry on the register as well as the registered owners of the sites in question along with undertaking a site valuation. Vacant site registers were established in January 2017 by planning authorities and the registers will be populated as the preparatory work progresses during the year. My Department will monitor the implementation of the levy by local authorities to ensure that it is being fully utilised, in line with its intended purpose going forward.

With regard to addressing the issue of the hoarding of residentially zoned land, I have tabled a number of amendments to the provisions relating to the extension of duration of planning permissions in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016, which is currently at Dáil Report Stage. The amendments proposed are collectively aimed at tightening up the provisions in relation to the extension of duration of planning permissions and ensuring that extensions of duration, without commencing substantial development, will no longer be facilitated.

My Department does not hold information on the ownership of land banks in the Greater Dublin Area or elsewhere. However, it is envisaged that the vacant site registers currently being developed will provide additional information - including ownership details - on key sites which have been identified by local authorities for housing and urban regeneration purposes. The Department's www.myplan.ie web browser holds a comprehensive amount of relevant publicly accessible information in relation to zoned land, including a repository of lands which are residentially zoned and which have been prioritised for development in the phasing/release programmes of the relevant local authorities. This mapping initiative is an important free resource for those involved in planning and other related disciplines. My Department will continue to develop and improve it so that it gives a more centralised land and housing activity map-based system for public and private housing.

With regard to the provision of housing on State-owned lands, I published on 27 April 2017

the first phase of the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, as committed to under Action 3.5 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. This is a vital initial step in the new State Housing Land Management Strategy being developed within the context of the new National Planning Framework - "Ireland 2040: Our Plan". The map is the result of a significant amount of work carried out by my Department, local authorities, the Housing Agency and other State and semi-State bodies. The datasets published on the map include details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency-owned sites, totalling some 1,700 hectares, including location and size, as well as 30 sites (comprising some 200 hectares) owned by State or semi-State Bodies, situated in major urban centres. Some 350 hectares of this land is in the Dublin region. The map also shows the locations of 144 active private construction sites, encompassing some 5,200 new dwellings, which are under construction in the Dublin region.

The map is freely accessible on an interactive portal at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/> and data on sites can be extracted in a number of forms, including on a local authority basis.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2157. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if persons on the transfer lists are included in the count for those on the housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26729/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The purpose of the Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) is to capture the total number of households qualified for social housing support across the country whose social housing need is not being met, in order to better understand the level of need for such support.

Under the annual SSHA process, all housing authorities are required to review certain households who are on their housing list but who are not in receipt of housing support. This is to ensure that the details of the applicant households are up to date and accurate and that they remain eligible for, and in need of, social housing support in accordance with the criteria set down in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 as amended by the Social Housing Assessment (Amendment) Regulations 2016.

The "Net Need" is the total number of households on the record of qualified households (housing list) that are not currently in receipt of Social Housing Support. This figure is determined by removing duplicates, those households appearing on multiple lists in different authorities, and households already in receipt of Social Housing Support e.g. those in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment or those that have applied for a transfer. Households that are on a local authority's transfer list are in receipt on social housing support and therefore they are not included in the 'net need'.

Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency

2158. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the role of the National Building Agency, NBA; if the agency currently employs staff members; the number of board members currently appointed to the NBA; the name of each person; the most recent remuneration figures for board members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26736/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The National Building Agency Ltd. (NBA) was registered as a company in 1960 and was the subject of the National Building Agency Act in 1963. The Agency was a multi-disciplinary, professional design practice set up to provide a broad range of consultancy services to public authorities in support of varying policies of Government including housing, urban renewal, urban and rural planning as well as other construction related activities.

Following a review of functions of the Agency, the Affordable Homes Partnership and the Centre for Housing Research, the functions of those bodies were taken over by the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency. That Agency was initially established on an administrative basis in May 2010 and formally established by the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency (Establishment) Order 2012 with effect from 1 August 2012. The National Building Agency ceased operating on 30 June 2011 and it is in the process of being wound up. It therefore has no employees.

Pending its dissolution, the Agency still has a Board with 4 members. They are Mr Rich Howlin as the Chairperson; Ms Bairbre Nic Aongusa, an Assistant Secretary in my Department; Mr John O'Connor, CEO of the Housing Agency; and Mr Peter Carey, Chief Executive of Kildare County Council. Mr Howlin, as Chairperson, received a fee of €2,130 in 2012. This was the last fee paid to Mr Howlin. No fees have been paid to the other members of the Board.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

2159. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the tenant purchase scheme and persons having to provide proof of payment for Irish Water domestic bills to local authorities with their application; if he will amend this criteria for qualification for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26739/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum, have been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year and have been allocated a house under a local authority allocation scheme.

The requirement to pay water charges is a condition under the scheme and is reflected in legislation. Section 3(A)(9) of the Water Services Act 2014 (inserted by Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015) provides that a person who is a tenant of a dwelling let to him/her under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 and who proposes to purchase the dwelling shall before completion of the sale provide the local authority concerned with a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming that any charge under section 21 of the No. 2 Act 2013 in respect of the dwelling owed to Irish Water has been paid. The sale of the dwelling cannot proceed until a certificate of discharge in respect of the dwelling has been received from Irish Water.

The Oireachtas has approved the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services and I am committed to legislating on the recommendations. My Department is working on legislative proposals in line with the recommendations of the report, including in relation to the position of those who have paid and have not paid water charges.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

2160. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will review the income ceiling for qualification on local authority housing lists in view of the fact those that do not qualify cannot qualify for home loans and have no security in their accommodation. [26750/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda originally set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports is scheduled to commence later this year.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

2161. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has issued instructions to all local authorities to request that any non-Irish housing applicants be asked to provide proof that they do not own property in the country of their birth regardless of the number of years they have lived here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26751/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The primary purpose of social housing support is to assist the provision of suitable accommodation for households who have a housing need but do not have sufficient resources

to secure accommodation from their own resources.

The 2011 Social Housing Assessment Regulations provide that a household is ineligible for social housing support if a household member owns alternative accommodation that the household could reasonably be expected to use to meet its housing needs, either by occupying it or by selling the accommodation and using the proceeds to secure other suitable accommodation. On foot of this provision, Part 11 of the prescribed social housing application form seeks information on property ownership in the State and abroad and this applies to all applicants for social housing support.

A household is required, under Regulation 11 of the 2011 Regulations, to provide to the housing authority such additional information, including documents and other particulars, as is sought by the authority for the purpose of verifying information relating to its application for social housing support.

It is a matter for the local authority to determine what is required in individual cases. My Department would expect that any information sought by a local authority in this regard would be appropriate, having regard to the circumstances of the household concerned.

Housing Assistance Payments

2162. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that landlords and letting agencies are discriminating against persons in receipt of the housing assistance payment (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26815/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 22,000 households in receipt of HAP, including 7,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement. In excess of 17,000 separate agents and landlords are providing accommodation to HAP supported households.

To date in 2017, an average of 329 additional households a week are having their housing need met by finding private rental accommodation and landlords willing to enter into a tenancy agreement on the basis of HAP support. In order to provide access to information on the scheme to interested parties, a new HAP website, www.hap.ie, was recently launched and provides prospective HAP tenants and landlords with the information that they need to understand how the HAP scheme works. Local authorities are also promoting the scheme locally, and engaging with letting agents and landlords who might be interested in entering into a HAP tenancy. HAP provides landlords with many advantages including that the landlord does not have to collect the rent; payments are made electronically directly to the landlord on the tenant's behalf; landlords who rent to tenants in receipt of HAP may avail of increased tax relief; and changes in a tenant's employment circumstances do not affect the rental payments made to the landlord.

A landlord or an agent acting on behalf of a landlord is not legally obliged to enter into a tenancy agreement with a HAP recipient. However, since 1 January 2016, a person cannot be discriminated against when renting because they are in receipt of certain payments, including HAP, so landlords can no longer state when advertising accommodation that HAP is not accepted. If a person feels that they have been discriminated against by a landlord or their agent, they can make a complaint under the Equal Status Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission. Further information is available on the Commission's website, <https://www.workplacere->

lations.ie.

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

Departmental Reports

2163. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the report on MICA will be published before the summer recess; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26867/17]

2209. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the situation of persons in counties Mayo and Donegal whose houses have been affected by pyrite; and the timeframe for dealing with this issue. [27618/17]

2254. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to establish a redress scheme for homeowners affected by mica in the north west in view of the recent publication of the expert panel report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28860/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2163, 2209 and 2254 together.

The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in April 2016, to investigate the problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo. The panel had the following terms of reference:

- (i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;
- (ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;
- (iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and
- (iv) To submit a report within six months.

The Expert Panel on concrete blocks met with many key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, the elected members of Donegal and Mayo County Councils, local authority officials, industry bodies, academics, public representatives and other interested parties. A substantial volume of information was provided by affected homeowners in both counties, as well as from Donegal and Mayo County Councils, while additional information was also provided through the deliberative process of the Panel.

The panel concluded its meetings on 3 February 2017. The draft final report was sent for legal proofing. The Chair of the expert panel submitted the final report, to my Department on 6 June 2017 and it was published on the 13 June 2017. The report is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/>

files/report_of_the_expert_panel_on_concrete_blocks.pdf.

In relation to the scale of the problem, based upon the information received, the Panel estimates that the minimum number of private homes affected in County Donegal is likely to be approximately 1,200 dwellings although there may be as many as 4,800 dwellings potentially affected. In addition, a total of 541 social housing units are considered to be affected by Donegal County Council. This figure may rise as the Council continue to investigate the emergence of the problem within their housing stock.

In the case of County Mayo, the Panel estimates that the minimum number of private dwellings likely to be affected is approximately 345 dwellings. Based upon the available information, the Panel cannot be more definitive than this in their estimation. A total of 17 social housing units across 3 estates are known to be affected by Mayo County Council.

The Panel's report concludes that the nature of the problem is manifested primarily by the disintegration of the concrete blocks used in the construction of the affected dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo. This in turn has resulted in the appearance of a particular pattern of cracking in the external render of these dwellings. The dwellings are single storey, dormer and two-storey with both housing estates and one-off rural types constructed by contract and by self-build affected. On the basis of the information received, the Panel is of the view that the reason for the widespread pattern cracking in the affected dwellings is primarily due to excessive amounts of materials in the aggregate used to manufacture the concrete blocks which gave rise to deleterious effects. The material in County Donegal was primarily muscovite mica while in County Mayo it was primarily reactive pyrite.

In many of the affected dwellings, the problems appear to have been exacerbated by their location in geographic areas of severe exposure and the ingress of moisture into the concrete blocks; the problems were possibly accelerated by the extreme weather conditions arising in the severe winters of 2009 and 2010 in particular.

A total of 5 engineering solutions have been proposed by the panel as remedial solutions to address the problems in the two counties ranging from removal and replacement of the outer leaf of affected walls only to complete rebuild of the dwelling.

There are eight recommendations contained in this report and my Department is taking action to implement recommendations, and will be in contact with relevant bodies shortly.

In addition and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

Brexit Negotiations

2164. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26902/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the

EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the Institute of International and European Affairs on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market, with considerable negotiation required around trading arrangements. Contingency work at national level is examining all scenarios and we cannot pre-empt the outcome at this stage. The complexity of these negotiations is well recognised and detailed planning to prepare for these is underway.

My Department has established structures to manage its input to the cross-Government work underway. While no immediate, large-scale issues arising from a situation of no Brexit deal being reached have been identified within the specific remit of my Department at this point in time, it is inputting to all discussions and deliberations taking place centrally. The Brexit negotiations will be a dynamic process unfolding over the course of the next two years and we will address any threats that may emerge.

Insurance Data

2165. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the insurance premiums paid by each local authority in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 in respect of public liability insurance, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26940/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of the insurance premiums paid by each local authority in respect of public liability insurance are a matter for the local authorities concerned. Local authorities are independent in the execution of their powers and the directly elected members are democratically accountable for all expenditure of the authority. The information requested is not available in my Department.

Planning Issues

2166. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the working group comprising representatives of his Department and of planning authorities tasked to undertake a review of the 2005 planning guidelines for sustainable rural housing has had its first meeting; if its work is now underway; the reason it has taken until 2017 to act on the judgment of the European Court of Justice in 2013 in the Flemish decree case; the reason he has not rescinded the 2005 guidelines in view of this European ruling rather than holding them in place pending the outcome of the review; if he has received advice on same; his views on whether persons could have a case for compensation for the refusal of their application to provide a home for themselves and their families under the restrictions contained in the rural housing guidelines over the period since the 2013 European Court Judgment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26941/17]

2175. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community

and Local Government further to the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union in a case (details supplied) which found insufficient support for measures giving residents of an area preference in acquiring housing in that area, her views on the impact that this will have on similar restrictions imposed by county councils here. [27147/17]

2263. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the implications for local authorities and planning regulations here of a European Court of Justice ruling against the Flemish authorities in relation to restrictions on non locals living in certain areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28965/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2166, 2175 and 2263 together.

The Working Group that is reviewing the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing has been established in light of ongoing engagement between the European Commission and my Department on the matter, arising from the European Court of Justice ruling in the Flemish decree case referred to. The Working Group held its first meeting on 18 May and a further meeting on 13 June. It would be inappropriate to rescind any part of the 2005 Guidelines until the nature of the action required on foot of the Court’s ruling is decided upon, in consultation with the European Commission.

It is intended that the revisions to the Guidelines will be finalised in the second half of 2017. When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which requires planning authorities, and where appropriate An Bord Pleanála, to have regard to any such planning guidelines in the performance of their statutory functions under the Planning Acts.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2167. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of projects which have been submitted by local authorities under the one stage approval process for local authority social housing construction projects under €2 million in value or under 15 units as set out by his Department in early 2016; and the number of units being delivered by these projects in each local authority area, in tabular form. [26964/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): To date, three social housing capital construction projects have been advanced by local authorities via the single stage approval process for projects of up to 15 houses or with a maximum all-in budget up to €2m. These schemes are for the delivery of 3 social homes in Drogheda, Co. Louth, 8 in Athy, Co. Kildare and 4 at Proudstown Road, Navan, Co. Meath.

The uptake under the single-stage approval option was considered in a process and procedures review that was recently completed on ‘Social Housing Design, Approval and Delivery’ and which is available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social-Housing_Approval-Processes-Procedures-Review-1.pdf.

This review looked at the use of the single stage process, noted its poor take-up to date by local authorities and identified the need to undertake further work with individual local authorities with a view to improving take-up. This work is now being progressed in the context of quarterly meetings between my Department and each individual local authority.

Given the process improvements overall in relation to social housing approvals, under which

the overall pipeline of social housing construction projects has been expanded significantly to encompass over 10,000 new social homes, it will be a matter for each local authority to decide as to how to advance each individual project. However, the regular technical meetings with the local authorities mean that the option to use the single-stage process can be actively examined on a project-by-project basis.

Public Sector Pensions Data

2168. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his Department, excluding those in the Civil Service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26971/17]

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

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

Pyrite Remediation Programme

2169. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if adequate funding is in place to meet the remediation costs for all successful applications to the pyrite remediation scheme during 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27017/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board’s website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The scheme is applicable to dwellings, which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established, in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a

Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion.

A sum of €22 million was announced under Budget 2017 to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme in 2017. This allocation will facilitate the remediation of some 400 additional dwellings this year and is a clear signal of the continuing importance attached by Government to addressing the issue of significant pyritic damage in private dwellings. As at end May 2017 an aggregate total of 749 dwellings were completed since the scheme was first introduced. My Department keeps the funding situation under review and in the event of additional funding being required in 2017, the potential for re-allocation of savings arising elsewhere within my Department's budget is open to consideration.

Local Authority Staff Data

2170. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of permanent positions that remain unfilled in Kildare County Council in each of the years 2012 to 2016 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27046/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The data gathered do not provide details in respect of the number of permanent positions that remain unfilled in Kildare County Council in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and accordingly the information requested is not available in my Department. Broad staffing numbers for the local authority sector are available on the Public Service Numbers Databank which is hosted and maintained by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and is available at the following link: <http://databank.per.gov.ie/>. The Databank provides access to information from 1980 onwards.

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.

Irish Water

2171. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will change the tendering process used by Irish Water which is excluding smaller contractors from tendering for projects; his views on whether local contractors should be in a position to tender for works that they would have carried out prior to the establishment of Irish Water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27090/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Contracts entered into by Irish Water are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

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

Question No. 2172 answered with Question No. 2156.

Local Authority Funding

2173. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when infrastructural funding will be available to open up the proposed development road on the Ardmore Road, Mullingar in order to allow for future construction works. [27125/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to relieve 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 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 the public infrastructure, which when provided, would secure the early delivery of additional affordable housing at considerable scale, 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. The overall funding sought by Local Authorities was far in excess of the funding available. Westmeath County Council submitted two proposals in respect of Mullingar and Athlone.

On 28 March 2017, I announced funding for 34 projects under the LIHAF. The cost of these projects is €226.46 million, of which €169.65 million would 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.

Westmeath County Council received approval for its project at Athlone, with an allocation of €1.83m. However, due to the substantial oversubscription of proposals, it was not possible to approve other valid and worthy proposals, including the Mullingar proposal, within the funding available.

I am seeking additional funding for LIHAF under the review of the Capital Plan 2016-2021, but it will be a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, to consider in the context of other demands for the available funds. In the event that more funds are secured, proposals that did not receive funding will be reconsidered and Local Authorities will also have an opportunity to advance new proposals that would meet LIHAF objectives.

Disability Act Employment Targets

2174. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27136/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan

Murphy): The 2005 Disability Act puts in place obligations on all Public Body employers in relation to the employment of people with disabilities. One of these obligations is a target that at least 3% of the workforce should be persons with disabilities; at the end of 2016 my Department had achieved a rate of 4.6%.

While my Department does not hold specific competitions for persons with disabilities, they are eligible to apply for all of our competitions provided that they have the appropriate qualifications. The Department also hires staff through open competitions run by the Public Appointments Service.

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency under the aegis of my Department is set out below:

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

Question No. 2175 answered with Question No. 2166.

Local Authority Staff Data

2176. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has conducted a review of planning personnel capacity in each local authority; if his attention has been drawn to the shortages of specialist staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27183/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 review organisational staffing needs and to recruit and assign staff to specific functional areas.

While my Department has not conducted a review of planning personnel capacity in local authorities, since January 2015, 107 sanction applications have been received from local authorities for specialist planner posts. Of these 107, 4 applications were withdrawn and 103 were approved by my Department.

In 2016, sanction was delegated from my Department to almost all local authority Chief Executives to fill vacancies at Executive Planner level and below, in line with their agreed workforce plan, without seeking approval from my Department. Local authorities must apply

to my Department for planners additional to their agreed staffing numbers and currently there are no applications pending.

Emergency Services Personnel

2177. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to meet with the Minister for Health to discuss a memorandum of understanding between the Health Service Executive and local authorities in addition to the financial resources that would be required to implement these supports across the State in respect of utilising the services of firefighters, employed full time or on a part time retainer in their capacity as trained emergency first responders as a back up to the ambulance service. [27214/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Responsibility for the provision of emergency medical services, including pre-hospital emergency care, rests with the Health Service Executive (HSE) which operates the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and emergency departments in hospitals in accordance with health sector legislation and national policy. The HSE operates under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health.

As Minister with policy and legislative responsibility for fire safety and the provision of fire services by local authorities, my primary concern is that local authority-provided fire services are meeting their statutory obligations in respect of the provision of fire services and fire safety. These responsibilities include the important activity of community and other fire safety initiatives as well as response to 999/112 calls. In 2013, the policy document Keeping Communities Safe was published and, for the first time, set out standards and norms against which local authorities can benchmark their fire services. In April 2016, the first report of the External Validation Group, titled Local Delivery – National Consistency, was published. This report assessed the review process undertaken in each of the 27 local authority fire services, and provided an appraisal of the current state of our local authority fire services.

In general, there is a high degree of collaboration and co-ordination of emergency activity among the Principal Emergency Services. As well as being able to call on Community First Responders, the NAS is aware that many fire services are equipped with automatic external defibrillators and have trained their fire-fighters in Cardiac First Responder and Emergency First Responder to Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council standards. Fire services are so equipped and trained in the first instance for ensuring the health and safety of their own staff, but can use their skills and equipment where they encounter casualties at emergency incidents.

Fire services generally respond to calls for assistance from external bodies in accordance with protocols operated within the three fire services Regional Communications Centres. In some circumstances, the HSE's NAS calls for assistance from fire services in certain situations or for responding to certain categories of 999/112 emergency calls. However, there is no national framework or agreement for cross-mobilisation between the Principal Emergency Services.

The feasibility of fire services being commissioned by the HSE to provide a response in support of the NAS for ECHO - immediately life-threatening cardiac or respiratory arrest - emergency calls is currently being discussed by a Joint Working Committee of the Fire Services National Oversight & Implementation Group (FSNOIG), which consists of fire service management and staff representatives, with a working brief to consider "the possibility and development of a proposal for fire services collaboration with the National Ambulance Service in responding to appropriate Clinical Status 1 999 emergency Calls".

Any proposal emerging from these discussions will be considered in the first instance by the Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management and could be used as the basis for discussions with the Health sector on this matter, if appropriate, including engagement at Ministerial level, if necessary.

Experience has shown that any proposal for formalising such assistance needs to be subject to appropriate governance and cost reimbursement arrangements and to be set in the context of a service agreement which will not impact on or adversely affect fire services' primary roles. It is important in such circumstances to ensure that local authority and fire services resources are not diverted from their statutory fire service and fire safety responsibilities where they are providing assistance for another public body. The potential impact on the current HSE's Community First Responders schemes would also have to be assessed by that sector.

Water Services Provision

2178. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the percentage of pipes used in the water system servicing the Moylagh and Oldcastle area of County Meath which are made of asbestos. [27303/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Irish Water is responsible for water services infrastructure including water supply pipes and I have no function in these matters.

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

Housing Data

2179. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason his Department makes the assumption that 400 new housing units are converted each year when estimating annual completion statistics; and his views on whether this is a wholly outdated statistical practice in view of the fact that there are a number of more accurate measures for counting or estimating the number of conversions each year. [27304/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy. Data on number of private house completions, which are based on the use of ESB connections, are available on my Department's website at - <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/construction-activity-completions>.

Methodological changes to the way this data is collected or presented are made from time to time. My Department included an estimate for the number of conversions for a number of years to reflect a concern that the data was not fully reflective of total activity. Conversions were added to the figures collected from the ESB to account for the fact that self-contained dwellings, provided by way of the conversion of existing buildings were no longer being included in the ESB data at that time. An annual estimate of 400 such units were added on the basis of an analysis of planning permissions which was carried out at the time of this change of meth-

odology. This practice ceased at the end of 2008 and no completions estimates since that date include these adjustments.

Building Regulations

2180. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if it is a statutory requirement for all design certifiers and assigned certifiers to have professional indemnity insurance. [27305/17]

2181. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department or a body under its aegis or professional bodies retain or have access to statistics on the number or percentage of assigned certifiers that have professional indemnity insurance and on the number or percentage of assigned certifiers that have latent defects insurance; and if so, if he will supply same. [27306/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2180 and 2181 together.

The Code of Practice for Inspecting and Certifying Building Works, published by the Minister in accordance with Regulation 20G of the Building Control Regulations 1997 – 2015, specifies that the following persons may act as the Assigned Certifier, provided they are competent in relation to the particular works involved:

- (a) Architects that are on the register maintained by the RIAI under Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007; or
- (b) Building Surveyors that are on the register maintained by the SCSI under Part 5 of the Building Control Act 2007; or
- (c) Chartered Engineers on the register maintained by Engineers Ireland under section 7 of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Ireland (Charter Amendment) Act 1969.

Similarly, the Design Certifier must be one of the above registered professionals and must be competent to carry out their design and to co-ordinate the design activities of others for the works concerned.

The requirements for the members of each of the above professions to obtain insurance cover is a matter for each individual professional body. My Department has no function in relation to this matter nor does it collect, or have access to, any statistics in relation to the types of insurance cover subscribed to.

Owners, and homeowners in particular, who commission works should generally satisfy themselves as to the adequacy of the insurances held by contractors or professionals they may wish to consider engaging.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

2182. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will clarify household eligibility for affordable housing that local authorities are to provide under the land bank plan in view of his decision not to reinstate affordable housing schemes; and the way in which local authorities are to define eligibility criteria for affordable housing. [27307/17]

2183. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the eligibility criteria for affordable rental housing to be provided by local authorities under the land bank plan; and the income levels, housing need and other criteria households will have to meet in order to be considered eligible for affordable rental housing in these new schemes. [27308/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2182 and 2183 together.

As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, the commitment to develop an affordable rental model contained in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan is now to be progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones. Lands held by local authorities in such zones are to be brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging the value of the land to deliver the optimum number of units for rent, and in particular targeting middle-income households, in mixed-tenure developments.

In this regard, an important policy intervention in the delivery of new housing supply under Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland is the development of State-owned lands for mixed-tenure housing, particularly in the major urban areas, where demand is greatest. On 27 April 2017, details of some 2,000 hectares of land in public ownership were published, with the potential to deliver up to 50,000 homes nationally.

I have asked all local authorities to be innovative and proactive in developing these sites. The final model for each site, including the affordable rental element, will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, the elected members included, who are best placed to know and provide for the housing need in their area. Indeed, the Dublin local authorities are well advanced in bringing large-scale sites forward for mixed-tenure housing, with projects advertised that can deliver circa 3,000 homes in mixed-tenure developments in the Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council areas alone. My Department is considering, in conjunction with local authorities, what national and /or local requirements should be specified in relation to eligibility.

Planning Issues

2184. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to revise the guidelines for planning authorities on sustainable residential development in urban areas in view of the severity of the social housing crisis and very slow pace of delivery of local authority housing. [27309/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department routinely monitors the planning process and acts to ensure it facilitates appropriate developments to meet the broader housing requirements of society.

My Department's 2009 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas encourage local authorities to bring about high quality and sustainable urban development, using their development planning and management functions to deliver quality homes and neighbourhoods where people want to live, work and raise families. In particular, the Guidelines outline a range of densities appropriate to different location types, from lower densities at the edges of smaller towns through to densities in the range of a minimum of 50 dwellings per hectare in larger urban areas along public transport corridors. The Guidelines can be accessed through my Department's website at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Planning/>

FileDownload%2C19164%2Cen.pdf.

Government policy, as set out in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, is to deliver sustainable communities with an appropriate tenure mix for all our citizens, irrespective of the method of housing provision. Under Rebuilding Ireland, the target set out for social housing is to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisition and leasing over the period 2016 to 2021. This is supported through a significantly increased investment programme of €5.35 billion. A further €200 million is provided for the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund for investment in key enabling infrastructure to open up lands for early development.

While still at an early stage of implementation, there is already strong evidence that the focus on increasing and accelerating housing supply in Rebuilding Ireland is succeeding. In 2016, the housing needs of over 19,000 households were met through a range of housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. A further €1.3 billion has been provided for 2017 to support the accelerated delivery of social housing and the achievement of the 2017 target to meet the housing needs of over 21,000 households.

I have recently published the latest Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which is available at the following link: <<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>>. The report provides details of over 600 social housing projects, involving the construction of over 10,000 new social homes across the 31 local authority areas. The scale of the construction pipeline, as at end-Quarter 1 2017, represents a major escalation in the social housing build programme and more projects are being added on an ongoing basis, to ensure full delivery on the Rebuilding Ireland targets.

I am confident that the Guidelines referred to support all of these projects and ensure that planning authorities have the necessary tools to support sustainable residential development in urban areas, while at the same time ensuring the level of delivery necessary to deliver the targets set out under Rebuilding Ireland.

Planning Issues

2185. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether an over-rigid application of planning principles is impeding delivery of much needed social housing (details supplied); and his plans to implement a review of the reasons local authorities used for rejecting properties offered by NAMA. [27310/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): To end Quarter 1 2017, the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) had identified 6,947 units, associated with the security for loans that NAMA has acquired, that could be made available for social housing. Many of these units were in unfinished housing developments or developments that required significant remediation work. All of the units identified by NAMA, regardless of their condition, location or circumstance were offered to local authorities in the first instance.

To date, demand has been confirmed by local authorities for 2,780 of the properties that NAMA has identified as potentially available. Local authorities have confirmed that 2,423 of the properties are considered unsuitable by reference to sustainable planning and housing policy, or are located in areas with no social housing demand. A further 1,744 properties have been sold or privately let by the owners or receivers since the initial offer was made to the local

authority.

General information in relation to NAMA delivery for social housing is available on the website of the Housing Agency at the following link:

[https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/NAMA-\(1\).aspx](https://www.housingagency.ie/Our-Services/Housing-Supply-Services/NAMA-(1).aspx).

In consultation with my Department, the Housing Agency and local authorities, NAMA continues to work through its portfolio with a view to identifying units that could be made available. The local authorities and the Housing Agency have been working systematically through the units with NAMA to determine if there is a social housing demand for the properties identified as potentially suitable for social housing. However, many of these units may be in private rented use and it is not appropriate or desirable that such private tenancies would be displaced.

Where a demand is identified by a local authority, this information is provided to NAMA and efforts are made to secure as many of the suitable properties as possible for social housing.

Social and Affordable Housing

2186. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will issue a circular that reverses the decision to stand down all affordable housing provision made in 2011; and if not, the way in which he expects local authorities to provide affordable housing. [27311/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While there are no plans at this stage to introduce a new affordable housing purchase scheme of the kind that existed up to 2011, the Government recognises the housing affordability pressures in certain areas and is determined to see increases in the supply of high quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent, as quickly as possible, particularly in the major urban areas where demand is greatest.

At a strategic level, under the new 20-year National Planning Framework, there will be an emphasis on managing and utilising State lands to deliver housing and to ensure an active and healthy market for development land. The opening up of State owned lands for the development of mixed-tenure housing is also a key objective under Rebuilding Ireland.

Rebuilding Ireland also commits to the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the provision of affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is being progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones, leveraging the value of State-owned sites to deliver units for rental targeting middle income households.

On 27 April 2017, I published the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, a vital initial step in the new strategic approach to State land management. The datasets published on the map include details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency-owned sites, totalling some 1,700 hectares, as well 30 sites (covering about 200 hectares) owned by State or semi-State bodies. The map is available to view on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

It is crucial that much needed housing for families and individuals on the social housing waiting list, and for those on low to middle incomes, is delivered from local authority and State-owned sites as soon as possible. In the first instance, the specific approach to housing delivery

on each site, including the optimum tenure mix, is a matter for the local authority concerned, the elected members included, who best understand the housing needs in their area. In this regard, I welcome the fact that two of the Dublin local authorities have brought forward four key large-scale sites, capable of delivering 3,000 of these new homes, and I expect other local authorities to follow suit.

Mixed-tenure development on publicly-owned land provides the best way forward to deliver social and affordable housing quickly in a fully integrated and sustainable community. Importantly, it allows for risk-sharing and far quicker delivery of social housing and badly needed housing more generally, as part of the full development of individual sites, as a whole. Opening up the supply of State land in this way, for mixed-tenure housing, is a critically important intervention in addressing a situation where the pace of recovery in the house development sector is slower than we would like it to be. In practical terms, the development of these sites will mean accelerating social housing delivery and securing more homes for sale and rent at lower and more affordable price points.

I am committed to ensuring that the State secures the most beneficial use of its currently under-utilised assets for much needed housing in the shortest possible timeframe, and maximises the “public good” dividend through increased and speedier delivery of high-quality social and affordable homes. My Department is working closely with local authorities and other State agencies to ensure that the optimum mix of social and affordable housing is delivered from public land banks in the shortest possible time-frame and in a manner which achieves value for money and the best possible housing outcomes. The approach to be adopted in relation to individual sites will be decided on a case by case basis, taking account of the specific aspects of each site and the particular local housing considerations arising.

Planning Issues

2187. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether the decision made in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 to reduce the Part V obligation to 10% and remove the ability of developers to provide 10% affordable and 10% social housing in new developments will by definition make all new housing developments less mixed in terms of tenure and more polarised in terms of household income. [27312/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): An independent review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 which concluded in 2014 recommended that the provision of social housing through Part V should be retained and that the overall requirement should be up to 10% of units in residential developments. It was considered that this would copper fasten the original objective of Part V in the legislation - that is, the delivery of social housing, combined with integration and sustainable mixed-tenure communities across the country.

Following this, a number of changes to Part V were made in the Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 (the relevant sections were commenced with effect from 1 September 2015). A principal change was the reduction in the requirement from 20% to 10%. This reduction needs to be considered together with other amendments which reduced the options contained in section 96 for the delivery of units within a Part V agreement. The payment of cash in lieu of units or the transfer of sites or parts of sites was removed, and instead the remaining options are focused on the delivery of completed units.

I have no plans to amend the Part V arrangements. However, my Department will keep the

position under review, through closely monitoring the supply of housing generally and the options housing providers use for delivering on their Part V obligations.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

2188. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether the reliance on HAP for the majority of social housing provision rather than on new builds is having an impact on inflating rents in the private rental sector; and if he has commissioned research on the effects of reliance on HAP for social housing provision. [27313/17]

2203. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of homeless households that were offered participation on the homeless HAP; and the number of households that refused to participate on the scheme. [27505/17]

2204. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to the ministerial direction to local authorities on HAP recipients which instructs local authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that households benefiting from HAP can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support via a transfer list, his views on whether there is a perception amongst households, particularly homeless households, that they will lose their place on the social housing waiting list if they agree to take up HAP and that this is exacerbating homelessness; and his further views on the fact that in many local authorities being placed on a transfer list ensures that a household is not prioritised in the allocation of longer term and more secure social housing. [27506/17]

2205. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason HAP or homeless HAP recipients should be placed on transfer social housing waiting lists as opposed to the general social housing waiting list; and his views on whether this is done to make statistical reports of social housing waiting lists appear less severe rather than for substantive policy reason. [27507/17]

2206. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of households that have participated on the homeless HAP scheme that have transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support. [27508/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2188 and 2203 to 2206, inclusive, together.

Under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is one of the suite of social housing options available to local authorities to meet housing need. During the lifetime of the Plan, some 47,000 new social houses will be provided through mechanisms other than HAP (including build purchase, refurbishment and leasing), supported by Exchequer investment of over €5 billion, and housing output generally will be progressively increased towards the target of producing 25,000 houses per year through all channels.

It is recognised that the level of supply in some rental markets can make the sourcing of suitable accommodation challenging. The pressures in this regard are borne out by the latest data published by Daft.ie, showing that rent asking prices rose nationwide by an average 13.4% in the year to March 2017. However, the report also shows that rent inflation in Dublin has slowed over the last quarter. This is an early indication that the Rent Predictability Measures

introduced under the Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector are having the desired effect.

The long-term solution to the current homelessness issue is to increase the supply of homes. In this context, the fourth edition of Rebuilding Ireland's Monthly Housing Activity Report shows that housing construction activity continues to gather momentum, with an appreciable rise in the level of housing commencements notified to local authorities during March 2017.

Once a household has been deemed eligible for social housing support, it is a matter for the local authority to examine the suite of social housing supports available, including the HAP scheme, to determine the most appropriate form of support for that household. There are currently more than 22,000 households in receipt of HAP across the State, including some 7,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement and some 1,500 eligible homeless households in the Dublin Region. HAP is a flexible and immediate form of social housing support that is available to all eligible households throughout the State. A summary of the household classes supported by the HAP scheme at the end of Q1 2017 is as follows:

- Single/Single Sharing - 31%
- Couple/Couple Sharing - 4%
- Lone Parent with Children - 39%
- Couple with Children - 26%

The Homeless Pilot of the HAP scheme has been operational since February 2015, across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region, and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The focus of this pilot remains the transitioning of qualified households from emergency accommodation, including hotels, into private rented tenancies. To qualify for HAP under the homeless pilot scheme, a household must generally be accepted as homeless within the meaning of section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 by one of the four Dublin local authorities. The Homeless HAP support has also been used to prevent households from entering homelessness and homeless services.

While eligible homeless households may source accommodation for themselves, a dedicated placement team, the Dublin Place-Finder Service, has also been established to engage directly with property owners and support qualified households to find suitable tenancies and to ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. This is a particularly important service for households currently residing in emergency accommodation in the Dublin region.

My Department does not collate data regarding the number of homeless households that were offered participation in the homeless HAP scheme and the number of households that have refused to participate in the scheme.

Following the commencement of the provisions in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, HAP is considered to be a social housing support and consequently households are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list. Acknowledging that households on the waiting list who avail of HAP might have expectations that they would receive an allocated form of social housing support, Ministerial Directions issued during the pilot phase of the scheme to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP tenants could avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list. With the completion of the HAP roll-out nationally, I recently signed a Ministerial Direction, instructing local authorities to continue to offer HAP tenants access to other forms of social housing through the transfer list. This refreshed direction ensures that following completion of the HAP pilot phase, HAP tenants still get all the benefits of HAP and are no less likely to get a different form of social housing support. The information

on the dedicated HAP website, www.hap.ie, reflects the legislation and states that any HAP tenant who wants to access other social housing supports, may do so through the transfer system as operated by their respective local authority.

The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their scheme of letting priorities. The setting of such schemes is a reserved function of the local authority and as such is a matter for the elected members. I understand that the majority of HAP households do avail of the option to be placed on a transfer list. Since its statutory commencement in September 2014, some 356 households (at the end of Q1 2017) had transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support; 3 of these transferred from the Homeless HAP scheme.

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

Rent Controls

2189. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the review of the methodology for rent pressure zone designation will take place; and if public submissions will be sought by his Department on same. [27315/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has initiated a review of the Rent Predictability Measure. At this stage, the measure has been in place for 6 months and data from the Residential Tenancies Board's Rent Index Report for Quarter 1 2017 is also available. Using this latest data, it will be possible to ascertain the effectiveness of the Rent Predictability Measure and whether any changes need to be made.

On 15 June, my Department also announced the launch of a public consultation on the review of the Rent Predictability Measure and the system of Rent Pressure Zones introduced last December. The consultation will allow members of the public and interested parties to provide their opinions and suggestions on the functioning of the measure. A consultation guideline is available on my Department's website and submissions can be made until Friday, 30 June. The submissions received from the consultation process will feed into the review of the measure.

Question No. 2190 answered with Question No. 2156.

Housing Provision

2191. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has examined proposals to introduce tiered development levies with the intent of stimulating residential construction activity in the short term such as to allow local authorities to give preferential development levy rates to builders that build on a site quickly; and if local authorities are allowed to give preferential development levy rates to different developers as an incentive to develop a site quickly. [27318/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Stimulating residential construction activity through interventions on development contributions has already been examined by my Department. A development contribution re-

bate scheme featured as part of the Department's housing package, "Stabilising Rents, Boosting Supply" announced by the previous Government in November 2015. The primary objective of the scheme was to enhance the viability of the construction and sale of residential housing units at affordable prices in the locations of greatest need.

The scheme was subsequently launched in December 2015 and applies to the metropolitan areas of Cork City and County Councils, and all of Fingal, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin County Councils, as well as Dublin City Council. Eligibility was confined to residential developments of at least 50 housing units, where the units must be completed and sold by 31 December 2017 at a price not greater than €300,000 in Dublin and €250,000 in Cork. The rebate is payable in full for dwellings in the Dublin area with a confirmed sale price of up to €275,000, with an 80% rebate payable for units with a sale price between €275,000 and €300,000. In the Cork area, a 100% rebate will apply for dwellings with a sale price of up to €225,000, with an 80% rebate for units with sale prices between €225,000 and €250,000. The rebate will be paid solely in respect of development contributions paid to the relevant local authority for local authority infrastructure and services.

Further details of the scheme are available in the Circular letter launching the scheme which issued from my Department to the relevant local authorities, and which is available at the following link - <http://housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-type/circular?query=circulars>. Returns to date from the local authorities concerned indicate that there has been limited up-take in relation to the scheme.

The launch of the Help-To-Buy incentive in Budget 2016 has somewhat superseded the scheme, providing immediate and targeted support for first-time buyers of new homes in meeting their deposit requirements, creating greater certainty for the house building sector regarding the pool of available purchasers, and thereby encouraging and facilitating the construction of new housing units.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

2192. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the €300 million social housing PPP project that is currently progressing; and the estimated unitary payments that will be incurred, location of sites, number of units, ownership, maintenance structure and so on. [27381/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing PPP programme provides for an investment with a capital value of €300 million and is expected to deliver 1,500 social housing units in total, via three bundles.

Each PPP site is being developed in co-operation with the local authorities concerned. The first bundle comprises six sites in the Greater Dublin Area, with provision for over 500 units. Two of the sites are located in Dublin City, with one each in South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth. Dublin City Council has been appointed to act as the lead local authority for the delivery of this first bundle.

The second bundle comprises eight PPP sites which are to provide over 450 units. Three of the sites are located in County Cork, with one each in the cities of Galway and Waterford. There is a further one site in each of counties Clare, Kildare and Roscommon. Cork County Council is the lead local authority for this bundle.

Sites for the third bundle are currently being identified and are to be announced in the coming months.

The process of seeking planning approval for the first bundle has commenced. The procurement process is being led by the National Development Finance Agency. The tender notice for the first bundle was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 12 May 2017. Planning and tendering for the second bundle are expected to progress later in 2017, with arrangements for the third bundle to follow in 2018.

The payments made by the State are referred to as ‘availability’ or ‘unitary’ payments. The payments commence once construction is complete and the units are ready to house tenants. The amount of the payment is a bid item in the selection of the preferred tender. When a bidder tenders for the PPP project, the level of unitary payment is considered in assessing the competing tenders. This is to ensure that the State receives value for money. The payment mechanism included in the contract incentivises the construction, maintenance, operation and return of quality public-sector assets to the State.

Land for the PPP projects is provided by the relevant local authority by way of a licence. Ownership of State land is not transferred to the private partner PPP company.

Tenants allocated to social housing PPP units will be nominated by the local authority, in the normal manner, from the local authority social housing waiting list in accordance with that local authority’s allocation scheme.

Control of Dogs

2193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the level of compliance with dog control legislation is very low; his plans to address the non-compliance in view of the fact that it covers the rules relating to certain breeds of dangerous dogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27383/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The overall thrust of dog control legislation is to place the onus for compliance on dog owners and those in control of dogs to act responsively by keeping their dogs under effectual control, irrespective of breed. Such responsible dog ownership is the key to reducing incidences of dog biting and other problem behaviours.

It is important to note that the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 to 2010 set out a range of requirements that apply to all dog owners or any other person in charge of a dog. In particular, section 9 of the 1986 Act requires the owner or any other person in charge of a dog to accompany it and keep it under effectual control in any place other than the premises of the owner, the premises of the person in control of the dog, or other premises with the consent of the owner of the premises. Section 21 of the 1986 Act provides that the owner of a dog shall be liable for damage caused in an attack on any person by the dog; it is not necessary for the person seeking damages to show a previous mischievous propensity in the dog, or the owner’s knowledge of such previous propensity, or to show that such injury or damage was attributable to neglect on the part of the owner.

In addition to the foregoing, the Control of Dogs Regulations 1998 (as amended) set out further requirements that owners of specific breeds of dogs have to follow, namely that such dogs must be muzzled and led, on a sufficiently strong leash or chain not exceeding 2m in length, by a competent person over 16 years of age when in a public place.

Dog Licences

2194. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of €100 on-the-spot fines issued to persons in the past three years for not holding a dog licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27390/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Control of Dogs Acts, local authorities are solely responsible for operating and managing dog control and licensing services in their administrative areas and my Department has no direct role in this regard.

Each year my Department publishes statistics in respect of a range of dog control responsibilities of local authorities, including fines and prosecutions taken for breaches of the licensing, control and muzzling provisions of the Control of Dogs Acts.

Information up to 2015 is available on my Department's website at the following weblink:[http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-type/dog-control/type/statistics?query =](http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-type/dog-control/type/statistics?query=).

My Department is currently collating and validating the annual statistics in respect of 2016 and once validated, they will be published on my Department's website.

Control of Dogs

2195. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of dog wardens broken down by local authority. [27393/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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, including the Dog Warden service, of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

Statistical information of the number of dog wardens, broken down by local authority, is available on my Department's website at the following link

[http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-type/dog-control/type/statistics?query =](http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-type/dog-control/type/statistics?query=).

My Department is currently collating and validating the annual statistics in respect of 2016 and once validated, they will be published on my Department's website.

Special Amenity Areas

2196. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding recent correspondence by his Department to South Dublin County Council, Fingal and Kildare County Councils regarding the possible extension of the Liffey valley special amenity area order; if there has been correspondence since 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27400/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is not in receipt of any recent correspondence in relation to this is-

sue.

In 2009, the then Minister requested the relevant authorities (South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council, Dublin City Council and Kildare County Council) to consider the evaluation of lands to be the subject of a further Special Amenity Area Order for the purpose of extending the existing area to possibly include the Guinness/Farmleigh Bridge. Responses were received from these authorities and considered by my Department.

In general, the responses received in 2009 indicated that there were insufficient grounds or funds for extending the Order beyond its existing area. I have not received any additional information since that time in relation to this matter.

Street Nomenclature

2197. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the procedures for a local authority to change the name of a street in its authority; and the legislation that governs this issue. [27407/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The relevant statutory provisions relating to changing of place names are contained in section 79 of the Local Government Act 1946, as amended, under which the changing of the name of a locality is a reserved function of the council of the relevant local authority. Certain procedural matters relating to changing of placenames are provided for in the Local Government (Changing of Placenames) Regulations 1956.

Local Authority Housing

2198. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has considered allowing local authorities to add additional rooms to local authority houses under their remit on the grounds of overcrowding only and where no alternative accommodation is available or suitable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27433/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides capital funding to Local Authorities to undertake adaptations and extensions to their existing social housing stock. The scheme applies to extensions that are needed to address over-crowding.

Local Authorities are also encouraged to use Internal Capital Receipts to provide adaptations and extensions where required. It is a matter for the Local Authorities to prioritise the works according to local need.

Departmental Contracts Data

2199. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or any agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27451/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has not awarded any contracts to the company in question since March 2011.

Information in relation to contracts awarded by agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as follows:

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

Traveller Accommodation

2200. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if Louth County Council has made an application for funding in 2017 to develop Traveller accommodation; if so, the amount of funding that has been sought; the development projects which Louth County Council plans to support with this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27502/17]

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

As part of the annual capital allocation process, local authorities submit proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments which are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department in advance of allocations being made. As part of the capital allocations process for 2017, a request was received from Louth County Council for funding of €402,574 towards the continued refurbishment of Woodlands Park Halting Site, Dundalk. The Council has received an allocation of €237,087 from my Department towards the costs, while there is on-going communications between my Department and the Council regarding the finalised budget for the refurbishment.

Further proposals for projects and developments from local authorities, including Louth County Council, will be considered by my Department throughout the year as proposals are received, on a case by case basis.

Fire Safety

2201. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if officials of State organisations such as local authorities or fire services are authorised or empowered to enter a dwelling and direct or impose fire safety provisions on the persons living in a premises occupied as a single dwelling if the dwelling is attached to another dwelling such as, for example, terraced houses, attached houses, duplexes and-or multi-unit apartments; and if not, his views on whether this is a serious public safety risk as demonstrated in a case (details supplied) in which there was no firewall present between attached houses. [27503/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Premises consisting of a dwelling house occupied as a single dwelling are specifically excluded from the general obligations with regard to fire safety, as well as the inspection and enforcement provisions, in Part III of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. However, the provisions of this legislation are generally taken as applicable in dwellings within multi-unit developments or mixed-use buildings.

The Acts do not define a single dwelling and, while single dwellings are self-evident in most cases, consideration may be required on a case by case basis, and may ultimately require interpretation by the Courts.

A single dwelling is generally taken as either a dwelling house, a flat (separate and self-contained premises constructed or adapted for residential use and forming part of a building from some other part of which it is divided horizontally) or a maisonette (a dwelling forming part of a larger building, which has its rooms divided between two or more levels which are more than half a storey height apart).

Considerable progress has been made on enhancing the safety of occupants of dwellings through Community Fire Safety programmes and fire safety promotion over recent years, focused, in particular, on the domestic smoke alarm campaign. While each fire death is one too many, the annual fire death rate per million people in Ireland has been almost halved over the past 15 years, from 11.9 fire fatalities per million population on average for the years 2001 to 2003, to 6.9 on average for 2014 to 2016.

The construction standards for dwellings are covered by the Building Regulations. Part B (Fire safety) of the Regulations sets down the statutory minimum standards of fire safety provision which must be achieved when a new building, including a dwelling, is designed and constructed or when an existing building is subject to works involving an extension, a material alteration or a material change of use. This includes a requirement for adequate resistance to the spread of fire to and from neighbouring buildings.

Technical Guidance Document B – Fire Safety provides specific guidance on construction methods to comply with this requirement. Where works are carried out in accordance with this document this will, prima facie, indicate compliance with the fire safety requirements of the Building Regulations. Compliance with the Building Regulations is the responsibility of the owners, designers and builders of the buildings or dwellings concerned.

Part B/ TGD B has recently been revised under Part B/Technical Guidance Document B - Fire Safety - Volume 2 Dwelling Houses 2017, which comes into effect on 1 July 2017.

Local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Building Control Act 1990 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, all of which may be relevant in relation to fire safety arrangements in residential buildings, other than those specifically excluded.

In the interests of supporting owners and residents living in developments such as the one

referred to, where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise, an independent fire safety expert has completed a review and a report on the matter has been received by my Department. The report remains under consideration pending clarification of a number of issues. Accordingly, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on this case at this juncture.

In response to the recent tragedy at Grenfell Tower in London, I have requested that each local authority be asked, as a matter of urgency, to review their multi-storey social housing units to ensure that all early warning systems, including alarm and detection systems and means of escape including corridors, stairways and emergency exits are fully functional and in place. Life safety must be our first concern.

In terms of raising awareness across landlords, including landlords of households in receipt of social housing supports and rental assistance, I have requested that the Residential Tenancies Board be asked to notify all landlords of their responsibilities and obligations as landlords in terms of ensuring that their properties fully comply with fire safety requirements.

In order to remind builders, assigned certifiers, designers and owners of their obligations in relation to compliance with the Building Regulations, I have also requested that a notification be issued to all registered users (approx. 52,000) through the Building Control Management System (BCMS).

Although there are no apartment blocks in Ireland comparable to Grenfell Tower, all householders, regardless of the type of accommodation they live in, are urged to take the basic but most effective fire safety precaution of ensuring that their family's home is protected with working smoke alarms. I have also, last week, emphasised the fire safety responsibilities of management companies more generally in control of multi-occupancy buildings and urged them to satisfy themselves that the arrangements in place are appropriate and safe.

Building Regulations Compliance

2202. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has undertaken a regulatory impact analysis of the proposals to require all active builders to be on the construction industry register; and his views on the potential impacts this could have on restricting market entry and reducing competition. [27504/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has completed a Regulatory Impact Analysis in relation to the General Scheme of the proposed Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill 2017, which is available on my Department's website at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/other/regulatory-impact-analysis-building-control-construction-industry-register-ireland-bill-2017>.

The proposed Bill will establish a mandatory statutory register of builders in Ireland with a view to ensuring quality, competence and good practice in the construction sector. It is also an essential consumer protection measure which will provide consumers who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator.

In drafting the General Scheme of the Bill, a critical priority has been to ensure that the proposal does not create a barrier to entry, reduce competition or discriminate between builders depending on their place of establishment. In this regard, the intention is to achieve the objective of ensuring quality, competence and good practice in the construction sector in the most

proportionate and least restrictive manner possible.

Questions Nos. 2203 to 2206, inclusive, answered with Question No. 2188.

Traveller Accommodation

2207. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 139 of 16 November 2016, the criteria used by his Department to establish the allocation figure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27579/17]

2208. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 139 of 16 November 2016, if the funds not drawn down by the local authority were restored to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27580/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2207 and 2208 together.

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

The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs. The first three TAPs covered the periods 2000-2004, 2005-2008 and 2009-2013. Local authorities adopted the fourth and current round of TAPs in April 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period and they also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for specific projects and developments.

As part of the annual capital allocation process, local authorities submit proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments which are assessed on a case-by-case basis by my Department in advance of allocations being made.

Funding is recouped to local authorities on eligible expenditure incurred and, where it is likely that an allocation to a local authority may be unspent or under-spent, my Department engages with local authorities to re-allocate the funding to another scheme in order to ensure that drawdown is maximised before year-end.

Question No. 2208 answered with Question No. 2207.

Question No. 2209 answered with Question No. 2163.

Water Services Infrastructure

2210. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will expedite the making of an agreement in view of the fact that there is no national agreement between Irish Water and local authorities for the taking in charge of

water services infrastructure and that the lack of such a national agreement is delaying the taking in charge process of numerous housing estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27620/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in 2016 to support and accelerate overall national and local action on the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, including estates with developer-provided water services infrastructure (DPI).

A specific focus of the initiative was to expedite progress by local authorities and relevant stakeholders, including Irish Water, in addressing a build-up of pending cases relating to housing developments not yet taken in charge.

My Department will prepare a report in the coming months on key lessons learned from the valuable knowledge and experience gained under the NTICI which will help inform future taking-in-charge plans, including housing developments served by developer-provided infrastructure.

Departmental Expenditure

2211. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27708/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has not paid any monies to the organisation in question.

The information in relation to agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as below:

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

Question No. 2212 answered with Question No. 2154.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

2213. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the protocols and legislation under which a physically disabled person living in circumstances (details supplied) can obtain the opportunity for independent living; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [27779/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant housing authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations. In order to qualify for social housing support and be placed on a housing list, an applicant must be assessed by the authority concerned as meeting all of the eligibility and need criteria set down in the legislation.

Where a household is deemed by a housing authority to meet all of the eligibility criteria, which primarily relate to income and alternative accommodation, the authority may determine that the household has a housing need, and thus qualifies for support, on the basis of particular household circumstances or exceptional medical or compassionate grounds. It is important to note that the same process applies to all applicants, regardless of their personal circumstances.

Decisions on the qualification of specific persons for social housing support and the allocation of that support are a matter solely for the housing authority concerned. Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that the Minister's power to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to housing functions is not to be construed as enabling him or her to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with which a housing authority is or may be concerned.

Planning Data

2214. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the value of bonds payable on planning developments in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and the value of discount given on bonds by each local authority to each financial institution in tabular form. [27790/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 authority on planning applications received, the number of invalid applications, decisions to grant or refuse permission etc. However, the statistics gathered do not include information of the type referred to by the Deputy in respect of bonds taken out in respect of particular developments.

Construction Industry

2215. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the review on apartment construction costs will be completed; the person or body that is undertaking this survey of construction costs; when he will be making the report available to the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if it will be provided in advance of the budget. [27815/17]

2216. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether the housing agency should be tasked with undertaking an annual audit and publishing an annual database on average construction costs in the

economy which would be more independent than those undertaken by private firms involved in the construction industry; and if not, the reason therefor. [27817/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2215 and 2216 together.

Under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Government is committed to a broad range of measures to tackle, among other things, some of the costs associated with the provision of housing, including apartments. This involves undertaking a detailed analysis, in conjunction with the construction sector, to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland, in order to facilitate an increased level of housing output into the future.

A working group, chaired by my Department, with a broad range of industry representatives, has been established and has met on a number of occasions since December 2016. While it is intended that the working group will concentrate on the domestic market, the Housing Agency is currently advancing an analysis of delivery costs and international comparisons. Both studies are due for completion shortly.

Separately, my Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics including a House Construction Cost Index which monitors labour costs in the construction industry and the cost of building materials and can be accessed at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/private-rented-housing/house-building/national-house-construction-cost-index>.

Register of Electors Administration

2217. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the provisions which are in place for ensuring that all persons turning 18 years of age and eligible to vote are added to the register of electors; if he will liaise with his colleague the Minister for Social Protection, in view of the fact that this data is readily available from the Department of Social Protection in order to arrange that all those turning 18 years of age are automatically added to the register of electors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27852/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Electoral law provides for an entitlement rather than an obligation to be registered as an elector when eligibility criteria, including reaching the age of 18 years, are met. The preparation of the register of electors is a matter for each local authority, as a registration authority. It is the duty of registration authorities to ensure, as far as possible and with the cooperation of the public, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the register. In support of activity by local authorities in preparing the register of electors, my Department promotes greater awareness of the register of electors through an annual campaign of promotional posters, the use of social-media and the taking out of both newspaper and on-line advertisements. In addition, my Department liaises with student bodies and youth organisations to promote awareness amongst their members and younger people generally who may be registering for the first time.

I have no plans to introduce automatic registration of voters. However, the Government has agreed that work should now commence on modernisation of the voter registration process, in the context of facilitating the registration of voters resident outside the State, in the event of an extension of the franchise at Presidential elections being approved by the people in a referendum. This will deliver benefits by providing for the registration of all voters in an efficient and user-friendly manner, while also, vitally, protecting the integrity of the system. All aspects of voter registration, including the legal provisions, will be reviewed as part of this project.

Appointments to State Boards

2218. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28214/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): No former TDs have been appointed to the boards of State Agencies under the aegis of my Department through the Public Appointments Service process.

Details in relation to the membership of State Boards including the dates of appointment and mechanisms of appointment of members are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/corporate/transparency-data/appointments-state-boards/appointments-declg-state-boards>.

Emergency Accommodation Data

2219. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 444 of 16 May 2017, the number of emergency accommodation service providers that received section ten funding from central government in each of the years 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017. [27954/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation rests with individual housing authorities. Therefore, operational issues, including the procurement of services, are a matter for the individual housing authorities and no direct payments are made by my Department to the providers of emergency accommodation.

Departmental Expenditure

2220. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost to his Department of Irish language officers currently employed in agencies or bodies for which his Department has responsibility. [27999/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The cost of employing Irish language officers is an operational matter for each agency or body under the aegis of my Department.

Arrangements have been put in place by each agency and body to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as below:

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie

Agency	Email address
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Irish Water Safety	oireachtas@iws.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Pobal	oireachtasqueries@pobal.ie

Control of Dogs

2221. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to conduct a review of the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 to 1992; if he will appoint an expert panel to review this legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28013/17]

2230. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will establish a panel of experts and other interested parties to review dog bite prevention and relative legislation with a view to bringing legislation into line with other EU countries and focusing on the obligations and responsibilities of dog owners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28242/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2221 and 2230 together.

The overall thrust of dog control legislation is to place the onus on dog owners and those in control of dogs to act responsibly by keeping their dogs under effectual control, irrespective of breed. Such responsible dog ownership is the key to reducing incidences of dog biting and other problem behaviours.

The Control of Dogs Acts set out a range of requirements for all dog owners or any other person in charge of a dog. In particular, section 9 of the 1986 Act requires the owner or any other person in charge of a dog to accompany it and keep it under effectual control in any place other than the premises of the owner, the premises of the person in control of the dog, or other premises with the consent of the owner of the premises. Section 21 of the 1986 Act provides that the owner of a dog shall be liable in damages for damage caused in an attack on any person by the dog; it is not necessary for the person seeking damages to show a previous mischievous propensity in the dog, or the owner's knowledge of such previous propensity, or to show that such injury or damage was attributable to neglect on the part of the owner.

In addition to the foregoing, the Control of Dogs Regulations 1998 (as amended) set out further requirements that owners of specific breeds of dogs have to follow, namely that such dogs must be muzzled and led, on a sufficiently strong leash or chain not exceeding 2m in length by a competent person over 16 years of age when in a public place. These specific control requirements in relation to certain breeds were introduced as a balanced and workable arrangement which recognises the rights of dog owners, while also taking account of the needs of society to be protected from dogs with a significant capability to inflict very serious injury or even death.

Consultation was undertaken with a range of expert bodies as part of the development of the Control of Dogs legislation and my Department remains in ongoing contact with relevant stakeholders on issues regarding dog control. In addition, the statutory responsibility for the enforcement of the relevant legislation rests with the local authorities whose dog control per-

sonnel work on enforcement on an on-going basis.

I have no plans to amend the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 to 2010 in respect of these matters in view of the requirement for all dog owners and those in control of dogs to keep their dogs under effectual control, and the strict liability for damages that attaches to the owner should damage be caused to a person by a dog.

Constituency Commission

2222. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the Constituency Commission's report will be published. [28018/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 5 of the Electoral Act 1997 provides for the establishment of a Constituency Commission upon publication by the Central Statistics Office of preliminary census results. Census 2016 was taken on 24 April 2016. The function of the Constituency Commission is to make a report on the constituencies for the election of members of the Dáil and for the election of members of the European Parliament, having regard to Article 16 of the Constitution and to the provisions of sections 6(2) and 6(3) of the Act. Following publication of the preliminary census results on 14 July 2016, the Constituency Commission (Establishment) Order 2016 was made establishing the current Constituency Commission to begin work on its report on Dáil and European Parliament constituencies.

Section 9 of the Electoral Act 1997 provides that the Constituency Commission must present its report to the Chairperson of the Dáil no later than 3 months after the publication of final census results. These results were published on 6 April 2017 and, therefore, the Constituency Commission must present its report to the Chairperson of the Dáil no later than 6 July 2017.

Tribunals of Inquiry Recommendations

2223. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the outstanding recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal yet to be implemented, in tabular form. [28027/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments - otherwise known as the Mahon Tribunal - was established by Order of the then Minister for the Environment and Local Government in 1997 to inquire into, and report on, various planning matters, as set out in resolutions passed by the Dáil and Seanad in relation to the establishment of the Tribunal.

The Tribunal made in total 64 recommendations in its Final Report in 2012, of which 10 are planning-related and fall to my Department to implement. Some of these planning related recommendations have already been implemented, such as:

- the development of Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategies by the Regional Assemblies, and
- prohibiting the use of powers available to elected members under Section 140 of the Local Government Act 2001 in relation to planning matters.

Implementation of the majority of the remaining Mahon Tribunal planning-related recom-

mendations is provided for in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 which is presently at Dáil Report Stage. Specifically, the Bill proposes to provide legislative underpinning in respect of the following Tribunal recommendations:

- the establishment of a new independent Office of the Planning Regulator,
- placing on a statutory footing the proposed new National Planning Framework – to be titled Ireland 2040: Our Plan – as a successor to the 2002 National Spatial Strategy,
- the introduction of measures to provide enhanced transparency in the planning process, including requirements for the publication of submissions on local area plans and development plans, as well as the Chief Executive’s Report on such submissions, on the planning authority’s website,
- the forwarding of any proposed grants of planning permission, which would materially contravene a development plan or a local area plan, to the relevant Regional Assembly for observations, and
- the payment of reduced or no fees by elected members, when making submissions on planning applications, as well as the noting of such representations on the relevant planning file.

There are two planning-related recommendations of the final report of the Mahon Tribunal which have not been progressed. The first recommendation relates to the proposal that members of the Regional Assemblies should be directly elected. The Government decided not to create directly elected regional entities in the context of its approval of the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Putting People First, in October 2012, which set out the Government’s decisions on local government reform measures.

The other planning-related recommendation that remains outstanding relates to the introduction of a requirement that planning applicants be required to disclose if they have made a political donation to an elected member of a local authority, when making a planning application and also to indicate the identity of the donation’s recipient. In relation to political donations generally, the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012, which was enacted on 28 July 2012, significantly enhanced the openness and transparency of political funding in Ireland and addressed many of the issues that were central to the recommendations made on political finance in the Final Report of the Mahon Tribunal. The Act brought into force restrictions on corporate donations and considerable reductions in the maximum amount that a political party (€2,500) or an individual (€1,000) can accept as a political donation. A new limit was also established for donations in cash (€200). The donation threshold amount that gives rise to the requirement to open a political donations account was reduced to €100. The thresholds at which donation statements must be reported and published were reduced while the Act also provided that political parties be required to submit audited annual accounts to the Standards in Public Office Commission for review and publication.

In relation to non-planning related recommendations identified in the Final Report of the Mahon Tribunal which fall within the remit of my Department, and specifically in relation to political finance, I enclose further details in tabular form as requested.

Political Finance Recommendations

Recommendation	Summary Response	Lead Dept
24. Amend the definition of the term ‘donation’ to cover all donations given, received or used for political purposes.	Not implemented but will be kept under consideration in the context of future reviews of the Electoral Acts.	D/HPCLG

Questions - Written Answers

Recommendation	Summary Response	Lead Dept
25. Introduce prohibitions on certain types of donations.	Implemented by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
26. Lower the thresholds permitted for political donations.	Implemented by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
27. Place an overall limit on the aggregate amount which can be donated by an individual.	Not implemented but will be kept under consideration in the context of future reviews of the Electoral Acts.	D/HPCLG
28. Amend the existing expenditure restrictions to cover all political expenditure, etc.	Not implemented but will be kept under consideration in the context of future reviews of the Electoral Acts.	D/HPCLG
29. Introduce a requirement to disclose annual audited accounts by political parties, elected representatives and electoral candidates.	Implemented for political parties by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
30. Lower the level at which donations must be disclosed.	Implemented by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012) but not to the level proposed by the Mahon Tribunal.	D/HPCLG
31. Introduce a requirement to provide more detailed information regarding the source and nature of received donations.	Implemented in part by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
32. Introduce a requirement to disclose donations received prior to elections.	Not implemented but will be kept under consideration in the context of future reviews of the Electoral Acts.	D/HPCLG
33. Introduce a requirement on political parties to supply details of their organisational structure as a condition of registration.	Implemented by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
34. Introduce restrictions on persons entitled to receive donations on behalf of a political party, etc.	Not implemented on the grounds of the transparency and reporting provisions introduced in the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Bill 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
36. Entrust the enforcement of the Local Elections (Disclosure of Donations) Act 1999 to an external, independent body.	Not implemented but will be considered in the context of the Government commitment to establish an independent Electoral Commission.	D/HPCLG
37. Include administrative sanctions in sanctions for breaching the political finance acts.	Implemented in part by the Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 (No. 36 of 2012).	D/HPCLG
38. Sanction certain acts or omissions in relation to donations.	Not implemented but will be kept under consideration in the context of future reviews of the Electoral Acts.	D/HPCLG

In response to other recommendations, the previous Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform published the Public Sector Standards Bill 2015 to replace Part 15 of the Local Government Act 2001 which provides for the ethical framework for the Local Government system. The purpose of the Bill is to significantly enhance the existing framework for identifying, disclosing and managing conflicts of interest and minimising corruption risks, while also achieving a shift towards a more dynamic and risk-based system of compliance and ensuring that the institutional framework for oversight, investigation and enforcement is robust and effective. This approach is considered to be integral to the quality and efficacy of public governance and the addressing of corruption risks. The Bill is presently at Committee Stage in the Dáil.

All other recommendations are the responsibility of a number of other Government Departments and it is a matter for them to report on their implementation in the first instance.

Animal Welfare

2224. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the dog breeding establishments guidelines will be published following the closure of consultation on the matter on 28 February 2017. [28058/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is in the process of reviewing the current Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, in collaboration with the County and City Management Association Dogs Working Group. Following the production of a first draft revision of the Guidelines, it was considered important 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. I expect the findings to be submitted to me very shortly, which I will consider carefully and without delay.

Departmental Staff

2225. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if employees of his Department, including Met Éireann employees, have attended the meetings of a group (details supplied); and if so, if they have reported back to his department on the proceedings of the meetings of the group. [28061/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I understand that no employees of my Department attended meetings of the group referred to in the course of their official duties.

EU Legislation

2226. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the occasions on which his Department was deemed to be in breach of EU legislation; the issues involved in each case; if sanctions were imposed by the EU; the type of sanctions imposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28105/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Historically, over many years, infringement cases would have been initiated by the European Commission in relation to infringements of relevant EU legislation. In the period since May 2016, when the Government was formed following Election 2016, my Department has received notifications from the European Commission in respect of four cases in which Ireland has been deemed to be in breach of EU legislation. The information concerned is set out in the following table.

Issues involved	Stage of EU Infringement Proceedings	Sanctions imposed	Type of sanction	Status
Non-compliance with some provisions of Directive 2010/31/EU on the energy performance of buildings	Letter of Formal Notice issued (July 2016)	None	Nil	Department has met with and is in correspondence with the Commission in relation to plans to address this infringement.

Questions - Written Answers

Issues involved	Stage of EU Infringement Proceedings	Sanctions imposed	Type of sanction	Status
Failure to correctly apply Directive 91/271/EEC concerning urban waste water	Case referred to ECJ (Feb 2017)	None	Nil	Department is working with Irish Water and the EPA on a plan to achieve compliance.
Failure to submit 2nd cycle River Basin Management Plans	Letter of Formal Notice issued (April 2017)	None	Nil	A response will issue to the Commission prior to the end of June 2017.
Failure to fulfil reporting obligations under IN-SPIRE Directive 2007/2/EC	Letter of Formal Notice issued (May 2017)	None	Nil	Outstanding reports are being finalised.

My Department is monitoring each of the above cases carefully and is working with other Departments and agencies and liaising directly with the European Commission with a view to resolution of each of the cases at the earliest possible juncture.

If the Deputy is interested in the historical position pre-May 2016 and wishes to indicate the period of interest, I will endeavor to have the relevant information compiled .

Postal Codes

2227. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28138/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Communications Regulation (Postal Services) Act 2011 made provision for the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to enter into a contract for the development, implementation and maintenance of a national postcode system. Responsibility for the Eircode system rests with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

In terms of the impact on my Department, none of its applications were considered for any data loading to be carried out as part of the Eircode project and no expenditure was incurred developing business systems for it.

Certain datasets related to the Department's areas of responsibility, including the register of electors, were identified for uploading. However, the compilation and maintenance of these datasets is the statutory responsibility of local authorities and they are managed on their behalf by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA). The LGMA work programme is funded by way of agreed levies on local authorities.

Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency under the aegis of my Department, including the LGMA, to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for the LGMA is: corporate@lgma.ie .

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

2228. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of funding that is available from his Department to local authorities to purchase social houses in situations in which the accommodation is considered for

one person, two persons, three persons, four persons, five persons or six persons respectively; the funding that can be made available in situations in which there are serious medical cases involved in a particular application; the range of funding that is available; the way in which this varies from county to county; the particular funding for various categories of applications for the council to buy social housing in County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28173/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme, funding is available to all local authorities, including Laois County Council, for the construction and acquisition of suitable houses and apartments for social housing use. Local authorities have delegated sanction for the majority of acquisitions they undertake and my Department does not specify the different categories or sizes of social houses. These are matters for the local authorities themselves to determine, based on the nature and priority of their housing lists, including the range of family sizes, or other situations such as particular medical situations for which they are catering.

Nitrates Usage

2229. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will address concerns regarding new proposals on spreading slurry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28227/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In accordance with the Nitrates Directive, Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme is due for review this year. Negotiations with the European Commission with a view to having a revised Nitrates Action Programme in place by the end of 2017 have commenced.

As part of the review, a full public consultation process was initiated and closed on 28 April 2017. All submissions received on foot of this consultation are being given full consideration by an expert group comprising officials from my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and the Environmental Protection Agency.

It would be inappropriate to anticipate any outcomes of the review process in advance of its conclusion.

Question No. 2230 answered with Question No. 2221.

Housing Issues

2231. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his policy in relation to family hubs; if there is a model of best practice for the operation and management of family hubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28243/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of the response to the commitment contained in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness that, by mid-2017, hotels will only be used as emergency accommodation in limited circumstances, housing authorities are delivering a number of family-focused, supported temporary accommodation facilities. These custom-developed facilities will offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible

in hotel accommodation while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured.

These new family focused arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, cooking and laundry facilities and appropriate family supports.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, while my Department's role involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. It is therefore a matter for the relevant housing authorities to consider the precise operational and management arrangements for the various facilities.

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive is currently coordinating the development of a comprehensive National Quality Standards Framework for homeless services on behalf of all housing authorities. Consultation with service users and key stakeholders has been undertaken and the draft standards have been piloted in selected services. These standards, which will provide providers with a framework for continuous quality improvement in their services, will be implemented nationally during the course of 2017.

Housing Data

2232. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of units to date in 2017 acquired per annum under the housing agency's vacant housing fund by local authority and area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28266/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Actions 1.1, 2.5 and 5.6 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Housing Agency is actively and positively engaged with banks and investment companies in relation to its acquisitions programme. €70m is being provided in 2017 to the Housing Agency to establish a revolving fund to acquire some 1,600 units over the period to 2020 for social housing use. The Fund will be replenished by the Agency through the sale of units to the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector.

As of 31st May 2017, the Housing Agency has had bids accepted on 489 dwellings from a range of vendors with a total value of €86.92m. Of these, the Agency has signed contracts for 379 dwellings and 225 of these purchases have closed. The process of selling properties on to Approved Housing Bodies is underway. The table below sets out the breakdown of the 225 units acquired by local authority (as of 31/05/17).

Local Authority	Units Acquired
Carlow County Council	2
Cavan County Council	4
Clare County Council	3
Cork City Council	2
Cork County Council	8
Donegal County Council	6
Dublin City Council	17
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	2
Fingal County Council	33
Galway City Council	4

Local Authority	Units Acquired
Galway County Council	7
Kerry County Council	14
Kildare County Council	18
Kilkenny County Council	4
Laois County Council	9
Leitrim County Council	3
Limerick County Council	4
Longford County Council	2
Louth County Council	5
Mayo County Council	3
Meath County Council	13
Monaghan County Council	3
Offaly County Council	5
Roscommon County Council	1
Sligo County Council	2
South Dublin County Council	22
Tipperary County Council	2
Waterford County Council	7
Westmeath County Council	5
Wexford County Council	10
Wicklow County Council	5
Total	225

Commercial Property

2233. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department or a body under its aegis, including local authorities, has undertaken surveys of vacant spaces above commercial properties in Dublin or Cork, which could be suitable for residential use; if so, the results of these surveys; and if not, his views on whether a comprehensive survey should be undertaken to get a better grasp of building vacancy and potential residential vacancies above commercial properties in these cities. [28268/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Programme for a Partnership Government, published in May 2016, includes a commitment to examine reclassifying and incentivising the use of underutilised or vacant areas over ground floor premises in urban areas, for both residential and commercial use.

Similarly, a key objective of Pillar 5 of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, launched in July 2016, is to ensure that existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible and focuses on measures to use existing vacant stock to renew urban and rural areas.

Specifically, Action 5.9 of Rebuilding Ireland commits to reviewing planning legislation to allow the change of use of vacant commercial units in urban areas, including vacant or underutilised areas over ground-floor premises, into residential units without having to go through the planning process. This proposal is also incorporated in Action 6 of the Action Plan for Rural Development, launched in January 2017. My Department is presently progressing the drafting of the necessary revisions to the planning regulations to give effect to this action and it is intended that the new regulations, which will require the approval of both Houses of the Oireachtas, will be made as soon as possible.

My Department is also working with Dublin City Council in the context of the Living City Initiative (LCI), to explore the potential for further streamlining of the approach to redeveloping and re-utilising vacant properties. The aim of the LCI is to bring life back into designated historic areas of our main cities by offering tax relief for qualifying expenditure incurred on the refurbishment or conversion of certain buildings where qualifying conditions are met. In this context, the City Council has examined approximately 11,000 rateable units in its functional area. From a visual analysis in a sample number of streets, the City Council has estimated that there may be approximately 4,000 vacant units above commercial premises that could potentially be converted into residential use in its functional area. Despite amendments introduced to the LCI in Budget 2016 by the then Minister for Finance to make the Initiative more attractive, uptake remains limited. Dublin City Council therefore intends to re-launch it shortly to a wider target group in the hope of wider participation by property owners.

I also understand that Cork City Council carried out an employment and land use survey in 2011 which recorded vacancy above commercial premises in Cork City Centre but did not assess its suitability for residential purposes. The Council is currently preparing an Action Plan for the medieval core of the city in 2017 which will include a pilot survey of the potential of for utilising vacant upper floor spaces for residential purposes.

The Heritage Council has also been working with a number of local authorities on a Town Centre Health Check programme which includes the undertaking of assessments of the level of vacancy of residential, commercial and retail premises in town centres with a view to revitalising them and enhancing their economic sustainability. I am fully supportive of this approach to obtain accurate data on property vacancy and the subsequent development of Action Plans by the local authorities involved.

Departmental Staff Data

2234. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of staff in the housing delivery office; the respective grades of the staff working in the office; the details of professionally qualified staff working in the office, for example, planning, housing economists, architecture, construction, surveying and so on; the key outputs of the office since its inception; the targets the office is currently working to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28269/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In line with the commitment under Action 2.9 of Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a dedicated Housing Delivery Office (HDO) was established within my Department, in August 2016, to support the accelerated delivery of housing across the social and private sectors, and tenure spectrum, in an integrated and timely manner.

The Housing Delivery Office comprises a team of 4 people directly, led by Mr David O' Connor, former County Architect and Chief Executive in Fingal County Council. Other members of the team have extensive expertise in project management, finance, planning and local government, including people seconded from the local government sector and the National Development Finance Agency. The HDO works with the range of highly experienced technical officers within my Department across key disciplines such as architecture, planning, engineering and building control, project and construction management, quantity surveying, capital programme delivery and administration.

Working with the broader Housing and Planning Divisions in my Department, other key agencies, local authorities and the construction sector, the HDO supports the roll-out of com-

plex projects, including identifying and resolving barriers to delivery, and monitors progress across key sites as they progress. Among the key outputs coordinated and delivered through the HDO since its establishment are:

- A review of the social housing design, approval, and delivery process, which was published in February 2017 and is available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social-Housing_Approval-Processes-Procedures-Review-1.pdf.

- A Programme Management and Review Framework to drive and track the development of the 23 Major Urban Housing Delivery Sites (MUHDS) which have the potential to deliver up to 30,000 homes in the medium term across 8 local authority areas, to monitor and manage progress through regular reports from Project Teams, ensuring that any impediments to progress are resolved in a timely manner.

- A database of suitable housing-zoned land in the ownership of State and semi-State bodies, which has been published on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, and can be accessed here: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>, and working with those State and semi-State bodies, and local authorities, to drive the development of these sites.

The HDO will continue to play an important role in supporting my Department, local authorities and the housing development sector in the roll-out of the multi-faceted actions under Rebuilding Ireland and in accelerating the supply of new homes across all tenures.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

2235. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he is taking to assist councils with lengthy social housing waiting lists in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28273/17]

2236. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to allocate or build additional housing for county councils in counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28274/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2235 and 2236 together.

Rebuilding Ireland has put in place both the targets and the funding resources to accelerate the delivery of social housing for all local authorities, including Cavan and Monaghan County Councils. There are currently over 600 social housing construction projects included in the Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which is now published on a quarterly basis and includes projects that are recently completed, on site, or undergoing planning and design. This list is being added to on an ongoing basis and the most recent version, covering the period to end Quarter 1 of 2017, is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>.

The Status Report includes 16 construction projects of various scale in Counties Cavan and Monaghan, involving 226 new social homes, one of which was completed in Quarter 4 of 2016 and four others that are currently on site.

In tandem with the construction programme, all local authorities have been undertaking the targeted acquisition of properties and since January 2016, my Department has provided almost €10 million to Cavan and Monaghan County Councils for this purpose, through which the two Councils have secured over 70 new properties for social housing use. The Councils have also

availed of funding from my Department to return vacant social housing to use. In the period 2014-16, the Councils refurbished 157 social homes with an exchequer investment of nearly €1.5 million and a further 25 social homes are to be refurbished in 2017.

Other social housing supports available to local authorities to meet the needs of households include the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), with both schemes operating well in Monaghan and Cavan. Monaghan was one of the first local authorities to commence HAP; since 1 October 2014, a total of 451 households have been supported. In Cavan, HAP commenced on 1 December 2016; to date, 56 households have been supported to find accommodation to meet their needs through this scheme.

Under my Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme, currently Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are managing 39 leased social homes in Cavan and 9 in Monaghan. There are also approvals in place with 3 AHBs, for 71 new social homes in Monaghan. As with all local authorities, I would encourage both Cavan and Monaghan County Councils to work constructively with the range of local and national AHBs that operate in their counties.

I am keen that both local authorities bring forward and advance projects as speedily as possible and they have been assured that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2237. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of persons waiting for local authority social housing in County Waterford; the number of families waiting for housing; the length of time; and the number of persons waiting for housing and the length of time, in tabular form. [28291/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments. The most recent figures available are the results of the 2016 Summary which can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf.

The 2016 results show that there were 1,596 households on Waterford City & County Council's record of qualified households as at 21 September 2016. Based on the results from the 2016 Summary, the length of time by households on the record of qualified households as at 21 September 2016 is as follows:

Less than 6 months	6-12 months	1-2 years	2-3 years	3-4 years	4-5 years	5-7 years	More than 7 years	Total
174	143	197	266	252	163	231	170	1,596

Roadworthiness Testing

2238. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding vehicle payload classification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28293/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan

Murphy): Regarding the vehicle in question, while it appears that two differing weights have been recorded on the National Vehicle and Driver File in respect of the technically permissible laden mass of the vehicle, following roadworthiness testing, there is a single motor caravan motor tax rate of €102 annually, regardless of the weight of the vehicle. Vehicle testing is a matter for the Road Safety Authority.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

2239. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of mortgage to rent transactions that have been completed since 1 January 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28350/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since the introduction of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme in 2012, a total of 3,679 cases have been submitted under the scheme to the end of May 2017. Of the 3,679 cases submitted, 2,870 were ineligible or terminated during the process. Of the remaining cases submitted, 256 have been completed with 39 of these cases completed during the period January to May 2017 and the remaining 552 cases are being actively progressed.

The Housing Agency publishes, on a quarterly basis, detailed statistical information on the operation of the MTR scheme. This information is available on the Agency's website at the following link:

<https://www.housingagency.ie/our-services/housing-supply-services/mortgage-to-rent.aspx>.

Recent amendments made to the scheme, arising from the Review of the Mortgage to Rent Scheme for borrowers of commercial private lending institutions published on 8 February 2017, have meant that more borrowers in mortgage arrears have access to the scheme. However, it will be some time before an increase in the number of successful cases will be apparent given that the optimum timeframe for processing a case should reduce to 9 months following the implementation of the Review's actions.

My Department and the Housing Agency are in the process of implementing each of the actions set out in the Review and I am confident that these changes will make a significant impact to those households who can benefit from access to the scheme.

Motor Tax

2240. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason some local authorities tax work vehicles commercially and others do not; and if he will clarify the situation regarding a person (details supplied) in County Kerry. [28358/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Motor tax is based on the construction and use of a vehicle. In order to qualify for the commercial rate of motor tax, a vehicle must be constructed or adapted for use as a goods vehicle and used solely for the conveyance of goods in the course of trade or business.

Licensing authorities have an obligation under Article 3 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing)(Amendment) Regulations 1992 to be satisfied that a vehicle is correctly taxed and it is thus open to a motor tax office to seek supporting documentation when commercial

motor tax is being applied for. Such documentation may include a certificate of commercial insurance or evidence of registration for VAT purposes or, at the discretion of the licensing authority concerned, any other appropriate documentation that would indicate that the applicant is in trade or business. It is up to the individual concerned to provide whatever evidence is required by the licensing authority in order for it to be satisfied that the applicant is entitled to the commercial rate of motor tax, which effectively is a concessionary rate.

Electoral Commission Establishment

2241. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the establishment of the electoral commission as outlined in the programme for partnership Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28410/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2015, on the basis of a consultation paper prepared by my Department, and at the invitation of the then Minister, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht undertook a public consultation process on the establishment of an electoral commission. The Committee published a report on the consultation in January 2016. This report contains a series of recommendations regarding the establishment of an electoral commission, including functions which should be assigned to it; independence, membership and accountability mechanisms; and the establishment process. The report is informing the implementation of the commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government on establishing an electoral commission and it is informing the preparation of an Electoral Commission Bill to give effect to that. My Department is in the first instance preparing a Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Bill.

Property Tax

2242. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the aims and objectives of the local property tax; if local services have improved since the introduction of this tax; if County Dublin receives its fair share of proceeds from this tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28472/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local Property Tax (LPT) was introduced to provide an alternative, stable and sustainable funding base for the local authority sector, providing greater levels of connection between local revenue raising and associated expenditure decisions and making the taxation system less dependent on other taxes.

It is a positive outcome from the policy of local retention of LPT that local authorities use LPT proceeds to pay for local services which were funded by Central Government in the past; this supports the overall objective of the local government reform programme, which is greater devolution to the local government sector, through supporting enhanced local decision making on spending priorities.

Local retention of LPT began in 2015. LPT allocations to every local authority were made in accordance with the Government's decision that 80% of the estimated LPT liability in each local authority area for a given year is retained in that area, notwithstanding any local variation decisions. The remaining 20% of LPT is re-distributed to provide equalisation funding to those local authorities that have lower property tax bases, due to the variance in property values and density across the State. This principle applies to every local authority.

The elected members of each of the four Dublin local authorities have taken decisions over the past three years to vary the LPT rate downwards by the maximum 15%. The full cost of that reduction is reflected accordingly in reduced LPT allocations to those local authorities.

Rent Controls

2243. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to extend the rent control provisions to Limerick city in view of the fact that rents are increasing rapidly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28558/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 sets out the process through which Rent Pressure Zones can be designated. It provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone.

For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

- (i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and
- (ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in the RTB’s Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€987 per month).

On 15 June, the RTB published the Rent Index Report in relation to Quarter 1 2017, which includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating Rent Pressure Zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country. This allows all interested parties to see exactly where their area stands in relation to average rent levels and increases and possible designation. The data from the Rent Index Report relating to Limerick City are detailed in the table below:

Local Electoral Area	Quarters >7%	Average 2017 Q1 (€)
Limerick City East	5	884.39
Limerick City West	5	913.68
Limerick City North	5	882.44

The latest available data for Local Electoral Areas in Limerick City indicate that these areas do not meet the criteria for designation at this time.

Under the Act, I have no further role or discretion in proposing areas for designation as Rent Pressure Zones or in deciding whether they should be designated. The designation process is independent and based on clear objective criteria and quantifiable evidence.

The Housing Agency will continue to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

My Department has initiated a review of the Rent Predictability Measure. At this stage, the measures have been in place for 6 months and data from the Residential Tenancies Board’s Rent

Index Report for Quarter 1 2017 is also available. Using this latest data, it will be possible to ascertain the effectiveness of the Rent Predictability Measure and whether any changes need to be made.

On 15 June, my Department also announced the launch of a public consultation on the review of the Rent Predictability Measure and the system of Rent Pressure Zones introduced last December. The consultation will allow members of the public and interested parties to provide their opinions and suggestions on the functioning of the measure. A consultation guideline is available on my Department's website and submissions can be made until Friday, 30 June. The submissions received from the consultation process will feed into the review of the measure.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

2244. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the obligations that a local authority has in providing emergency housing support to persons on the social housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28612/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 sets out the requirements for a person to be regarded as homeless by a housing authority for the purposes of the Act. Section 10 of the Act provides that a housing authority may provide assistance to a homeless person, including emergency accommodation or lodgings, which the housing authority may arrange itself or which may be operated by a State-funded service provider, without the requirement to undergo a social housing assessment and be approved for social housing supports.

Motor Tax

2245. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to review the motor tax system in view of the perceived or actual inequities in the system particularly for cars registered before 2008 and those persons that cannot afford to pay their tax in a single annual lump sum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28635/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Motor tax for pre-2008 cars is based on engine size. The basis of charging from 2008 onwards is on carbon dioxide emissions.

With the exception of some categories of vehicle that have a low annual rate, motor tax can be paid on an annual, half-yearly or quarterly basis. The rates applicable for the half-yearly and quarterly options are 55.5% and 28.25% of the annual charge, respectively. These relativities have remained generally consistent since the 1960's.

The differential takes account of the extra workload for staff in motor tax offices and the Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, which operates the online motor tax system, as well as the resultant administrative costs and printing costs that arise, including the issuing of renewal notices. Each quarterly renewal of motor tax follows the same administrative procedures as the annual renewal process. Consequently, renewing on a quarterly basis generates four times the workload of an annual renewal for the equivalent period.

Based on the number of transactions in 2016, the annual cost of abolishing the addi-

tional charge associated with the half-yearly and quarterly options would be in the order of €55.3m. Based on the current number of vehicles in the pre-2008 tax category, each reduction of 1% in motor tax rates for these vehicles would cost €5.3m annually. The loss of income that would arise from changing the current arrangements in either instance would have a negative impact on the total collected via motor tax and would have to be borne elsewhere in the motor tax system or through the taxation system generally; any such changes could therefore only be considered in a Budgetary context.

Local Government Reform

2246. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to abandon proposals to amalgamate Galway city and county council in view of the recent decision regarding Cork city and county council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28644/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Expert Advisory Group review on Local Government Arrangements in Galway is carrying out detailed examination and planning in relation to local government arrangements in Galway arising from the 2015 report of the Galway Local Government Committee (published in October 2016), which unanimously recommended the establishment of a new unified “Greater Galway Authority”. An interim report by the Expert Advisory Group was submitted to me on 19 June and will now be considered in my Department.

The position in light of the interim report will be reflected in the wider report on local government which, under the Programme for Partnership Government, is being proposed for submission to Government and the Oireachtas. Preparation of this report is continuing in my Department with a view to its completion later in the Summer.

In the case of the local authority arrangements in Cork, the Cork Expert Advisory Group concluded that, on balance, an expanded City Council area offered the best governance model for Cork.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

2247. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28668/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): All State Bodies under the aegis of my Department have submitted confirmation of their compliance with obligations under tax law for 2015.

In respect of the 2016 year the timeline for the submission of such confirmation does not expire until the end of June 2017.

Rent Controls

2248. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when an announcement will be made regarding the national rent review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28678/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has initiated a review of the Rent Predictability Measure. At this stage, the measure has been in place for 6 months and data from the Residential Tenancies Board's Rent Index Report for Quarter 1 2017 is also available. Using this latest data, it will be possible to ascertain the effectiveness of the Rent Predictability Measure and whether any changes need to be made.

On 15 June, my Department also announced the launch of a public consultation on the review of the Rent Predictability Measure and the system of Rent Pressure Zones introduced last December. The consultation will allow members of the public and interested parties to provide their opinions and suggestions on the functioning of the measure. A consultation guideline is available on my Department's website and submissions can be made until Friday, 30 June. The submissions received from the consultation process will feed into the review of the measure.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

2249. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the criteria for the allocation of funding under the housing adaptation grant scheme to local authorities across the State; and the reason the 2017 allocation to Donegal County Council is a fraction of the amount allocated to other local authorities serving a population less than County Donegal. [28719/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Allocations in respect of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability have been made to local authorities, for many years, based on their levels of contractual commitments. Local authorities were encouraged to maintain continuity in approving and paying grants and therefore, commitments carried forward into the new financial year had first call on available funding. This approach supported authorities that kept the grant schemes open and continued to approve eligible applications. Other local authorities adopted a more cautious approach and closed schemes when applications reached a certain level.

This had resulted in certain local authorities receiving a higher allocation than others per head of population. In response, the increases that have been secured in funding for these grants in recent years have been distributed in line with population. This approach has meant that no local authority's annual allocation has been decreased in recent years, but the distribution of funding is being progressively re-balanced with each increase, to be more aligned with population and that process will continue.

The careful management of these grants each year also supports the re-distribution of funding to those local authorities that have need and capacity for a greater level of spend. Any underspends emerging over the course of the year are re-allocated to local authorities that require additional funding and in this way, for example, Donegal County Council was allocated additional funding in 2016 over and above their original allocation. This approach will also continue in 2017.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

2250. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the timeframe for the implementation of the new tenant purchase scheme and the expected date for the introduction of same. [28797/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

2251. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to home owners advertising shared occupancy bunk beds (details supplied); the legal obligations of such activity; the rules or regulations in place to protect the rights of tenants in such accommodation; if his Department has intervened in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28798/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, recognises that the quality of rental accommodation is critical to the success and sustainability of the residential rental sector and its attractiveness as a long-term accommodation option for households.

A key commitment in the Strategy was to review the regulations governing minimum standards in rented accommodation, to bring them into line with modern requirements. That review has now been completed and new Regulations, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, have been made and will come into operation on 1 July 2017. These Regulations will replace the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008 and the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) (Amendment) Regulations 2009. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with the Regulations. Responsibility for enforcement of the Regulations rests with the relevant local authority.

In addition to the updated Regulations, procedures for a more efficient, standardised and transparent inspections and enforcement approach across all local authority areas will be introduced. Specific ring-fenced funding for inspections will be provided from 2018 onwards, with the aim of achieving a 25% annual inspection coverage of rental properties by 2021.

It is important to note that overcrowding and unfit houses are legislated for under Part IV of the Housing Act 1966. The Act defines overcrowding in terms of the numbers of persons sharing rooms and room size. Overcrowding may give rise to concerns in respect of fire safety, and may lead to enforcement action by fire authorities. Situations of overcrowding should be reported to the relevant local authority.

Partial use of houses as overnight guest accommodation, essentially for B+B purposes, is

provided for as an exempted development under Regulation 10(4) of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as long as not more than 4 bedrooms in a house are used and not more than 4 persons are accommodated in a bedroom.

Using a residential property as hostel accommodation is not exempted development and constitutes a change of use which would require planning permission.

Enforcement is a matter for the relevant local authority in its role as housing authority under the Housing Acts or as planning authority under the Planning and Development Acts, as the case may be.

Planning Issues

2252. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 215 of 30 May 2017, if every effort will be made to speed up the process of bringing forward guidelines to come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28812/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My predecessor as Minister, in conjunction with Mr. Denis Naughten T.D., the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, recently announced a “preferred draft approach” to the review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, focusing on noise, setback distance, shadow flicker, engagement with local communities, community dividend and grid connections.

A copy of the announcement is available on my Department’s website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/wind-energy/coveney-and-naughten-announce-key-development-review-wind-energy-development-guidelines>.

As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) will be undertaken on the “proposed draft approach” to the revised 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, otherwise known as 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.

It is envisaged that the SEA process will take approximately 9 months, including tendering for the appointment of SEA consultants and a public consultation period. In light of the SEA requirements, it is expected that the Guidelines will not be finalised and come into effect until Q1 2018. In the meantime, the current Guidelines remain in force.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

Water Pollution

2253. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the release of untreated sewage into the

River Boyne which is a special area of conservation at the beginning of June 2017 by Irish Water. [28843/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The primary responsibility for ensuring the prevention of pollution rests with the local authorities, which are in turn supervised by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for this purpose. The Local Government (Water Pollution) Acts 1977 and 1990 carry a general prohibition on the entry of any polluting matter to waters. Any persons causing or permitting polluting matter to enter waters is liable on conviction on indictment to a fine not exceeding €15,000,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years, or both.

The 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. Details of all prosecutions taken by the EPA for pollution incidents and details of its enforcement activities are published on the EPA's website (<http://www.epa.ie/enforcement/>).

While the incident in question was brought to my Department's attention, I have no direct role in the monitoring or supervision of water services. However, I understand that both Meath County Council and Irish Water have looked into this incident and a report has been sent to the EPA.

Question No. 2254 answered with Question No. 2163.

Housing Provision

2255. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of homeless family hubs to be put in place; the location of same; the funding for and number of beds in each hub; and the date on which these beds will be occupied. [28930/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of the response to the commitment contained in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness that, by mid-2017, hotels will only be used as emergency accommodation in limited circumstances, housing authorities are delivering a number of family-focused, supported temporary accommodation facilities (Family Hubs).

Family hubs are an important first response for families who become homeless and who have no alternative other than commercial hotels. The hubs will provide more appropriate and suitable accommodation for families. They are not a long term housing solution as families will move into houses and apartments that will be provided under social housing supports, as supply becomes available. This type of emergency accommodation provides a secure and stable placement for families on an on-going basis unlike the insecurity of hotel accommodation especially during peak periods and holidays.

These custom-developed facilities will offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, cooking and laundry facilities and appropriate family supports.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities. Accordingly, specific information in relation

to the number of families that will be accommodated in individual facilities is a matter for the Local Authorities. There are currently 15 family hubs, which are either completed or nearing completion in the greater Dublin area, where the need is greatest and I have requested that local authorities bring forward proposals for further family hubs.

Negotiations in relation to certain leasing and refurbishment costs of family hub projects across Dublin are on-going and the details are therefore commercially sensitive. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive has indicated that it is not in a position to release this information as to do so would compromise their negotiating position during this process, particularly against the background of the intention to bring forward proposals for further hubs.

Similar family facilities are being delivered in counties Limerick, Cork and Kildare.

Proposed Legislation

2256. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he will publish legislation to give effect to the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Charges; and if this legislation will deal with the issue of ensuring financial equity to those in group and private water schemes. [28931/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services was published on 12 April 2017 and approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Government approved the priority drafting of a Bill to give effect to relevant recommendations set out in the Committee's report on 30 May 2017. My Department is working with the Attorney General's Office on the drafting of the Bill with a view to it being published as soon as possible.

The Committee recommended that there should be equity of treatment and equivalent financial support between households on public water supplies and those in Group Schemes or using private supplies. When the details of the legislation are finalised, my Department will work with the National Federation of Group Water Schemes to ensure that households who do not receive public water services receive equivalent support to those that do.

Private Rented Accommodation

2257. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the work of the departmental working group on the regulation on short term letting, such as by a company (details supplied). [28932/17]

2264. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of times the short term letting working group has met since its formation in January 2017. [28993/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2257 and 2264 together.

Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector requires the establishment of a Working Group to provide clarity in relation to the appropriate regulatory approach, from a planning perspective, for short-term tourism-related lettings to address unintended consequences of short-term lettings, including withdrawal of supply from the rental market.

The Working Group met on 14 June and had a constructive discussion on the subject of appropriate guidance to planning authorities in relation to short-term lettings for tourism purposes. The group consists of representatives from my Department, the Departments of Finance and of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, An Bord Pleanála, Fáilte Ireland, the Residential Tenancies Board, and Dublin City Council.

The output of the Group will be a report on the appropriate regulatory approach for short-term tourism-related lettings and the identification of the necessary amendments to legislation required to effect such regulation.

In addition to establishing a working group to consider short-term lettings, my Department has been engaging with AirBnB over the last number of months to explore the possibilities for a collaborative agreement, under which practical steps to be put in place to ensure, where there are risks that short-term letting may result the removal of significant numbers of properties from the rental market, that planning requirements are respected. Discussions in this context are ongoing with a view to agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding in the coming weeks. If successfully concluded, this approach is intended to form the basis for putting similar arrangements in place with other on-line platforms.

Housing Data

2258. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the work of the departmental working group on housing statistics. [28933/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Data Analytics Group, convened by my Department, met for the first time on 3 May 2017 and is due to meet again on 5 July. The Group is made up of key stakeholders with a significant role and interest in housing matters. At its initial meeting, the Department presented the current position with regard to the housing statistics it publishes and the Central Statistics Office made a presentation on Census 2016 and in particular housing data gathered therein.

Once the summary note of the meeting is cleared by the Group, at its next meeting, it is our intention to publish it and all future meeting notes on the Rebuilding Ireland website (www.rebuildingireland.ie), along with the Group's Terms of Reference.

Housing Data

2259. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if funding requests from the housing agency for the purchase of vacant homes were refused in 2016 or in 2017; if so, the amount refused; and the proposed units that were not purchased as a result of this refusal. [28934/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency did not have any funding requests for the purchase of vacant homes refused in 2016 or 2017.

Under Actions 1.1, 2.5 and 5.6 of Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Housing Agency is actively and positively engaged with banks and investment companies in relation to its acquisitions programme. €70m is being provided in 2017 to the

Housing Agency to establish a revolving fund to acquire some 1,600 units over the period to 2020 for social housing use. The fund will be replenished by the Agency through the sale of units primarily to the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector.

As of 31st May 2017, the Housing Agency has signed contracts for 379 dwellings and 225 of these purchases have closed. The process of selling properties on to Approved Housing Bodies is underway.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

2260. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the social housing developments which his Department is refusing to fund at 100%; the location of these developments; the number of units involved; and the reason 100% departmental funding is not being provided. [28935/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Social housing construction projects undertaken by local authorities are ordinarily funded in full by my Department. There could be rare situations where a local authority may wish to undertake additional works to a housing development from within its own resources, but this would be very much the exception. If there is a specific project of interest, I will have the matter considered further if more detailed information is supplied.

Social housing developments that are implemented through Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) have different funding programmes and 100% Departmental funding may not always apply. For example, under the Capital Assistance Scheme, AHBs can avail of 100% funding if all tenancy nominations are to be made by the local authority, but reduced funding applies if the AHB wishes to retain a minority of nomination rights. AHBs also deliver social housing using the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) as a low interest loan to allow them access to early working capital (up to 30% of the relevant costs) for the purchase, construction or refurbishment of properties. Low interest rate borrowings are available to AHBs from the Housing Finance Agency to support the financing of the balance. The AHB effectively uses the CALF approval for the capital injection of up to 30% and the ongoing commitment of lease income under the Payment and Availability Agreement to leverage the balance of finance required.

Constituency Boundaries

2261. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the timeframe for the local electoral constituency boundary review for the 2019 local and European elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28950/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The most recent review of local electoral areas was carried out from November 2012 to May 2013 by a Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee established under the Local Government Act 1991. Unlike the position for Dáil and European Parliament constituencies, there is no constitutional or legislative requirement for the revision of local electoral areas.

The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of requirements in relation to local government reform, involving a report to Government and the Oireachtas by mid-2017 on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, including a commitment to consider reducing the size of local electoral areas.

Depending on the outcome of consideration of the mid-2017 report, any review of local electoral area boundaries would be undertaken in good time before the 2019 local elections.

Reviews of European Parliament constituencies are provided for in section 5 of the Electoral Act 1997 which requires the establishment of a Constituency Commission upon publication by the Central Statistics Office of preliminary census results. The function of the Constituency Commission is to make a report on the constituencies for the election of members of the Dáil and for the election of members of the European Parliament, having regard to Article 16 of the Constitution and to the provisions of sections 6(2) and 6(3) of the Act respectively.

Section 9 of the Electoral Act 1997 provides that the Constituency Commission must present its report to the Chairperson of the Dáil no later than 3 months after the publication of final census results. These results were published on 6 April 2017 and, therefore, the Constituency Commission must present its report to the Chairperson of the Dáil no later than 6 July 2017.

Housing Assistance Payments

2262. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are reluctant to sign up for the housing assistance payment scheme in fear they will be taken off the local authority housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28961/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): With the commencement of the provisions in the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is considered to be a social housing support and consequently, households in receipt of HAP are not eligible to remain on the main housing waiting list.

Acknowledging that households on the waiting list who avail of HAP might have expectations that they would receive an allocated form of social housing support, Ministerial Directions issued during the pilot phase of the scheme to ensure that, should they so choose, HAP tenants could avail of a move to other forms of social housing support through a transfer list. With the completion of the HAP roll-out and the ending of the scheme's pilot phase on 1 March 2017, a further Ministerial Direction was issued, instructing local authorities to continue to offer HAP tenants access to other forms of social housing through the transfer list. This refreshed Direction ensures that HAP tenants still get all the benefits of HAP and are no less likely to get a different form of social housing support.

The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their scheme of letting priorities. The setting of such schemes is a reserved function of the local authority and as such, is a matter for the elected members. I understand that the majority of HAP households do avail of the option to be placed on a transfer list. Since its statutory commencement in September 2014, some 356 households (at the end of Q1 2017) had transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support.

The information on the dedicated HAP website, www.hap.ie, reflects the legislation and states that any HAP tenant who wants to access other social housing supports may do so through the transfer system as operated by their respective local authority.

Question No. 2263 answered with Question No. 2166.

Question No. 2264 answered with Question No. 2257.

Housing Data

2265. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the average cost of one, two, three and four bed local authority new build units on the basis of costings submitted to his Department by local authorities over the past 12 months; if he will provide a breakdown of all in costs and construction only costs; and the itemised costed list of the individual non construction costs for each unit size. [28994/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The following are the average costs for the range of differently sized social housing units as sought by the Deputy, in terms of both construction costs and ‘all-in’ costs. These are based on the analysis of returned data from tendered social housing schemes over an extended period. Construction cost is reflective of building costs (including VAT) and also includes normal site works and site development. All-in cost includes cost of construction, land cost, professional fees, utility connections, site investigations/surveys, archaeology where appropriate, VAT and contribution to public art. Abnormal costs are excluded from these figures.

-	1 bed	2 bed (1 storey)	2 bed (2 storey)	3 bed	4 bed
Construction	€137,709	€143,371	€151,376	€160,521	€169,682
All-in	€175,271	€181,771	€190,456	€200,726	€211,062

My Department will continue to maintain a clear focus on delivering overall value for money on both the construction and all-in costs of social housing projects.

Departmental Staff Relocation

2266. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of staff under the remit of his Department that have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29037/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested in respect of requests for transfers to offices outside the Dublin region is set out in the table below. No costs were incurred in any such moves.

Year	Number of applications for transfers outside Dublin region.
2014	3
2015	1
2016	3
2017	0
Total	7

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

2267. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he will take to ensure sufficient resources are provided to local authorities to enable them to conduct the requisite levels of inspections of private rental properties to enforce current minimum standards for rental properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29119/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): When a property is let, or available to let, it must comply with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations. The Regulations specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, fire safety and safety of gas and electrical supply. Responsibility for enforcement of the regulations is a matter for the relevant local authority.

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.

The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, sets out a number of actions in relation to standards, with the combined aim of improving the quality and management of rental accommodation. On 27 January 2017, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 were made and will come into operation on 1 July 2017.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector also prioritises strengthening the inspection capacity of local authorities to increase the number and frequency of inspections of rental properties. In addition to the updated Regulations, procedures for a more efficient, standardised and transparent inspection and enforcement approach across all local authority areas will be introduced. Specific ring-fenced funding for inspection and compliance activity will be identified from 2018 onwards and annual targets for both inspection and compliance will be agreed with local authorities. The objective set out in the Strategy is to increase inspection numbers incrementally each year so that, by 2021, 25% of all rental properties are inspected annually.

Housing Assistance Payments

2268. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will take steps to increase rent supplement and housing assistance payment limits to realistic levels in order that they are in line with market rents as a homelessness prevention measure and to protect tenants from having to make unsustainable top ups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29120/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently 23,000 households in receipt of HAP, including more than 7,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement. There are currently more than 18,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the HAP scheme. On average in 2017, 330 new households are being supported by HAP each week.

The Government increased the maximum rent limits available under the HAP and Rent Supplement schemes across the country with effect from 1 July 2016. Furthermore, additional flexibility above the existing HAP rent limits was made available to all HAP local authorities from the same date. Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis.

The Homeless Pilot of the HAP scheme has been operational since February 2015 across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region, i.e. Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire-

Rathdown County Council, Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council, and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The focus of this pilot scheme is to transition qualified households from emergency accommodation, including hotels, into private rented tenancies. Additional discretion of up to 50% above rent limits is available to the Dublin local authorities to assist in housing homeless households in the Dublin.

While eligible homeless households may source accommodation for themselves, a dedicated placement team, the Dublin Place-Finder Service, has also been established to engage directly with property-owners and support qualified households to find suitable tenancies and to ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. This is a particularly important service for households currently residing in emergency accommodation in the Dublin region. A similar Place Finder service, known as the Cork City Homeless Place-finder Service, is now available to homeless households in the Cork City Council area.

At the end of Q1 2017, 14.4% of the total number of households being supported by HAP were benefiting from the additional flexibility that was provided to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limits. Excluding homeless households, 9.6% of all households being supported were benefiting from the additional flexibility and in those cases the average rate of discretionary payment being used was 14.3% above rent limits provided. My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland.

Rent Supplement is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Social Protection.

Fire Service Staff

2269. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number, location and classification of all fire stations in Galway city and county; the required complement of staff for each station; the number actually employed; the number of vacancies; the reason such vacancies exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28603/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Fire services are provided by local authorities in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003. Under section 10 of the 1981 Act, a fire authority is required to make provision for the delivery of fire services in its functional area, including the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises.

In relation to the staffing requirements in each local authority, under the Local Government Act 2001, it is the responsibility of each Chief Executive to employ such staff and to make such staffing, funding, recruitment and organisational arrangements as may be deemed necessary for the purposes of carrying out the functions of their local authority.

Any further queries on the matter should be addressed to the Chief Executive of the relevant local authority, in this instance Galway County Council.

Housing Assistance Payments

2270. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties that persons are having in

sourcing private rented accommodation through the HAP scheme in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28613/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Board Rent Index for Quarter 1 2017 published on 15 June 2017 indicates that while annual private sector rents continue to trend upwards, growing by 7.37% annually when compared with the same period in 2016, quarter on quarter growth appears to be moderating with an increase of less than 0.1%, down from 2.8% in the previous quarter. This is an early indication that the Rent Predictability Measures introduced under the Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector are having the desired effect.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. The increased rent limits introduced by the Government in the last year, together with the additional discretion available to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limit where necessary, are allowing HAP households to find suitable accommodation and willing landlords. On average in 2017, 330 additional tenancies are being supported by HAP each week, with just over 23,000 households currently having their housing needs met via HAP and some 18,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of monthly HAP payments. Particular additional targeted supports are available to homeless households in the Dublin and Cork City regions to assist them in finding accommodation in the private rental market, with the support of HAP.

Wicklow is an area regularly highlighted as a county where there is pressure in the private rented market, particularly in the Dublin commuter parts of the county. HAP became available in the administrative area of Wicklow County Council on 1 December 2016 and 157 households are currently being supported by the scheme, 43 of which are Rent Supplement transfers. A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP in each local authority area at the end of March 2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link: -

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

I am satisfied that the HAP scheme is generally working well, despite the challenging rental market, but I will keep its operation under on-going review.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Data

2271. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the proposed number of different lots that will be involved in each county as part of the retendering of the SICAP programme for the next tranche of the programme; the reason for the different number of lots in each county; the objective basis on which the number of lots for each county was decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28801/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is the largest social inclusion programme in the State and is a key priority for Government. The current SICAP programme will come to an end on 31 December 2017, and the successor programme (SICAP 2) is due to roll out in January 2018.

Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) are the SICAP contracting authorities in each Local Authority area. The current SICAP contracts were established on the basis of a total of 51 lots within the LCDC areas. The Lot configuration for each area was decided

by each LCDC on a democratic basis, based on their knowledge of the local areas and their demographics.

The next iteration of SICAP will be tendered for on the basis of the existing Lot numbers and configuration. This is underpinned by my Department's legal advice in the matter.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2272. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide the data regarding the social housing stock as a ratio of total population by county for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28813/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Population estimates at the level of County are produced by the Central Statistics Office every five years as part of the Census. Between Census years, annual population estimates are only produced at the level of Regional Authority. My Department produces estimates of the numbers of social housing units which are occupied on the last day of each year at the level of Local Authority. This data is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-rented-sector-activity>.

A table showing the population at end April 2011 and April 2016 from Census outputs, the numbers of social housing units occupied at the end of the prior year and the ratio between the two variables has been added to my Department's website at the same address.

Departmental Staff Data

2273. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form. [29251/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The number of staff serving in my Department by county is set out in table 1 below.

Table 1- Staff Serving at 31 May 2017

County	Headcount
Clare	20
Cork	16
Donegal	2
Dublin	441
Galway	1
Kerry	8
Kilkenny	2
Laois	2
Limerick	2
Mayo	94
Meath	3
Monaghan	2

County	Headcount
Offaly	2
Sligo	1
Waterford	1
Wexford	103
Total	700

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as below:

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

Brexit Issues

2274. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if contingency planning is completed to mitigate for the loss of information sharing as a result of a no deal scenario in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26550/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Regardless of the outcome of the EU-UK Brexit negotiations, no loss of information sharing between Ireland and the UK is envisaged in the Defence sphere. As the Deputy may be aware, on 19th January, 2015 Ireland signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department of Defence, Ireland and the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence on enhancement on certain aspects of Security and Defence Cooperation. This provides a framework for developing and furthering bilateral co-operation and relations between the Department of Defence and the UK Ministry of Defence. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding placed already existing cooperation arrangements in the Defence area between Ireland and the UK on a more formal and transparent footing, while fully respecting the differing policy positions and security arrangements of both States. The MoU takes into account matters such as military forces training; exercises and military education; exchange of views on EU Common Security and Defence Policy; potential for joint contributions to UN Crisis Management Operations; joint procurement initiatives; pooling and sharing resources; general sharing on reform in defence services; potential for staff exchanges; joint contribution to Security Sector Reform and capacity building in crisis locations and the sharing of information.

Following the signing of the MoU, an Action Plan containing a detailed programme of bilateral co-operation activities for the forthcoming years has been agreed, which will support the development of a greater mutual understanding of the policy considerations underlying our respective actions and engagement in multilateral arrangements including with the EU and the UN. It will also support training exchanges and staff exchanges involving both civil and military personnel and will provide opportunities for more joint and collaborative work in support of international peace and security including possible contributions to UN peacekeeping

operations.

Defence Forces Reserve

2275. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the Army Reserve promotions from second lieutenant to lieutenant due to be actioned on 5 November 2016 have not yet been processed despite being forwarded to his office to be finalised several months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26586/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Defence Forces Regulations CS4 set out the establishment for the Reserve Defence Force and provides for a total of 110 personnel at the rank of Lieutenant. Promotions from Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant take place within this establishment figure.

The Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) recommended that thirteen (13) Reserve personnel be promoted to Lieutenant in accordance with Defence Forces Administrative Instruction R5 and my Department received these recommendations at the end of February/beginning of March 2017. Subsequently, some clarifications were required at official level.

I am happy to inform the Deputy that I have already approved these promotions and I wish the newly promoted personnel every success in their new roles.

Defence Forces Personnel

2276. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will examine the conditions for the detachment of Defence Forces members stationed at Portlaoise prison; his plans to ensure the living conditions are of a satisfactory and comfortable standard for the Defence Forces members based there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26854/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence Forces continue to provide a 365 day armed guard at Portlaoise Prison by Government direction. The accommodation occupied by them is provided and maintained by the Irish Prison Service. Officials from my Department have on a number of occasions recently met with officials from the Irish Prison Service (IPS) regarding the military accommodation in Portlaoise. In May, a formal agreement was signed by both the Department of Defence and the IPS which sets out formally the provisions and arrangements to manage the accommodation occupied by the Defence Forces within the Prison. On foot of this agreement the IPS have advised my officials that they will be shortly going to tender for a major refurbishment of the military compound and would hope to have the works completed by the end of the year.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

2277. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the supply of Lariam to members of the Defence Forces; if he will consider using alternative drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26855/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Malaria is a serious disease and is a threat to any military force operating in areas where the disease is prevalent. There are three anti-malarial drugs in use by the Irish Defence Forces, namely Lariam

(mefloquine), Malarone and Doxycycline. The choice of medication for overseas deployment, including the use of Lariam, is a medical decision made by Medical Officers in the Defence Forces, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Irish Defence Forces. Significant precautions are taken by Irish Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of members of our Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications. It is the policy of the Irish Defence Forces that personnel are individually screened for fitness for service overseas and medical suitability. The objective is to ensure that our military personnel can have effective protection from the very serious risks posed by malaria.

The health and welfare of the Defence Forces are a priority for me. Anti-malarial medications, including Lariam, remain in the formulary of medications prescribed by the Medical Corps for Defence Forces personnel on appropriate overseas missions, to ensure that our military personnel can have effective protection from the very serious risks posed by Malaria.

Air Corps

2278. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will instruct an independent third party to carry out an investigation into the reason Forbairt inspection reports dating from the 1990s cannot be found in view of his Department's failure to locate the Forbairt files and in further view of the possible significance of these missing documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26895/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Minister of State at the Department of Defence, (Mr. Paul Kehoe, T.D.); As I indicated to the Deputy in my letter of 17 May 2017, I was advised by the Military Authorities that there was a report on measuring CO fumes from aircraft complied by Forbairt in 1995 and a further report on monitoring air contaminants in workshops in 1997, which was also complied by Forbairt.

Unfortunately, following an extensive search and the Military Authorities having consulted with Enterprise Ireland (which superseded Forbairt) and having also conducted a search within the Department it has not been possible to locate these reports.

The military authorities have indicated that the Defence Forces have neither a hard copy record nor an electronic copy of the Forbairt Reports. The Military Authorities have indicated that there are a range of potential causes for the loss of the reports such as the changeover of electronic recording systems in 2004 or that the reports were misplaced over time. However this is purely speculative.

It is not proposed to have an independent third party carry out an investigation into the reasons the Forbairt reports cannot be found.

Brexit Negotiations

2279. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the threats identified by his Department with regard to the responsibilities of his Department as a result of no deal being reached in Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26900/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The outcome of the vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK leading to the triggering of Article 50 by the UK in March

2017 does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). That said, given the significant role the UK has played in relation to the evolution of CSDP, it is likely that Brexit will have some impact on future developments in the Defence sphere at EU level. Until however the UK has indicated what kind of relationship it will seek with the EU and negotiations have been finalised, it is impossible to predict future possible outcomes in this regard. As the Deputy is aware formal negotiations commenced yesterday, and all potential consequences in the defence sphere, arising during the course of these negotiations will remain the subject of ongoing consideration by my Department. The Government has adopted a contingency framework to deal with all issues arising in respect of the UK vote to leave the EU. Accordingly, any issues arising, including those within the Defence area, whether bilateral, or in respect of developments in CSDP, or regarding our wider international multilateral defence engagements, will be also addressed within that framework. On 2nd May, the Government published a comprehensive document on *Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union*. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the forthcoming negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. In respect of the border, the potential implications in this regard will emerge during the course of the negotiations. It is this Government's stated goal to try to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible. Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána, while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners on request. The Defence Forces at all times keep operational plans under constant review and there will continue to be ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including through regular coordination and liaison meetings.

Similarly, in respect of fisheries protection and monitoring of Irish waters, the potential implications will emerge during the course of the negotiations. Accordingly, it is difficult at this stage to anticipate the implications including the impact on fishery protection requirements. The Naval Service and the Air Corps are working closely with the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) in relation to Brexit. Ongoing liaison with the European Fisheries Control Agency and with other Member States, will continue as appropriate. The Government is under no illusions about the complexity of these negotiations. In that regard, I wish to reassure the Deputy that my Department is monitoring the ongoing situation to ensure that it is well prepared to address any potential issues arising in the defence area on foot of Brexit.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

2280. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of the anti malaria drugs prescribed to the Defence Forces operating in sub Saharan Africa in 2016; and the number of troops prescribed each drug respectively, in tabular form. [26946/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table gives a breakdown of the number of Defence Forces personnel operating in sub-Saharan Africa who were prescribed a Malaria chemoprophylaxis during 2016.

Malaria chemoprophylaxis prescribed.	Total 2016
Doxycycline	6

Malaria chemoprophylaxis prescribed.	Total 2016
Lariam	42
Malarone	2

Public Sector Pensions Data

2281. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 378 of 23 May 2017, if he will provide the figures for all pension contributions made by public sector workers in each body under the aegis of his department, excluding those in the civil service, including the pension levy, in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [26969/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has overall responsibility for the administration of civil service pension schemes, which cover personnel in established and un-established civil service and State Industrial posts. Accordingly, the information in relation to civil servants working in the Department of Defence and civilian personnel employed with the Permanent Defence Force is included in the reply from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to Parliamentary Question 378 of 23 May, 2017. The requested information in relation to pensions contributions by members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) is shown below in tabular form.

Contributions made by PDF members in the years 2010-2017 in respect of Defence Forces Pension Schemes (excluding Single Public Service Scheme) are as follows:

Year	Defence Forces Pension Schemes: Employee Contributions (excludes Single Public Service Pension Scheme)
2010	€ 6,141 ,000
2011	€ 5,968 ,000
2012	€ 5,853 ,000
2013	€ 5,598 ,000
2014	€ 5,466 ,000
2015	€ 5,322 ,000
2016	€ 5,339 ,000
2017 (end-April)	€ 1,357 ,000

The Single Public Service Pension Scheme was introduced on 01 January, 2013 under the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012. All PDF personnel who join the public service after that date are members of the Single Scheme. The pension contributions made by PDF members of this scheme for the years 2013 to 2017 are as outlined in the table below. (It should be noted that these figures are included in the relevant table in the reply to Parliamentary Question 378 of 23 May, 2017).

Year	Single Public Service Pension Scheme: Employee Contributions
2013	€50,000
2014	€379,000
2015	€662,000
2016	€1,105,000
2017 (end-April)	€489,000

The public service Pension-Related Deduction (PRD), which is not a pension contribution, is applied to the pay of pensionable public servants, under terms set out in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009, as amended. The total PRD paid by members of the PDF for the years 2010 to 2017 is shown in the table below. (It should be noted that these

figures are also included in the relevant table in the reply to Parliamentary Question 378 of 23 May, 2017.)

Year	Pension Related Deduction
2010	€24,822,000
2011	€24,128,000
2012	€22,459,000
2013	€23,124,000
2014	€20,611,000
2015	€19,558,000
2016	€13,481,000
2017 (end-April)	€3,707,000

Disability Act Employment Targets

2282. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the policy regarding the employment of persons with disabilities in his Department and in each State and semi State body under the aegis of his Department; if there is a responsibility to employ persons with disabilities to a quota of 3% of its workforce; if this quota has now been exceeded; if there has been an advertised competition in relation to this quota; if not, the reason therefor; the dates and details of such competitions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27134/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the legal obligations of public service bodies

- to promote and support the employment of people with disabilities
- to comply with any statutory Code of Practice
- to meet a target of 3% of employees with disabilities
- to report every year on achievement of these obligations.

The NDA reports on compliance with this 3% target. In its latest published report for the calendar year 2015, the NDA noted that in the Department of Defence, 3.1% of civil servants and 4.6% of civilian employees had disabilities. The equivalent returns for 2016 were 5.39% and 4.3% respectively.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) was launched by the Government on 2 October 2015.

The Government has already taken a number of key decisions as recommended in the Strategy:

- the public service employment target for people with disabilities will be increased on a phased basis as set out in the Strategy from 3% to 6%.
- special public service competitions for people with disabilities will be arranged and we will open up alternative recruitment channels for people with disabilities.

These and other recommendations of the Strategy are being considered by a cross-party group chaired by Mr Fergus Finlay.

Defence Forces Pensions

2283. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim will have a decision on their application for a disability pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27440/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised that the individual in question was discharged from the Defence Forces on 1 May 2015 and that his application for a disability pension was received by my Department in June 2015. The nature of disability pension applications means that the procedure for investigating them takes some time to complete. Once an application is received in my Department the details provided must be checked and verified with the Defence Forces. Once all the details have been verified, the applicant is referred to the Army Pensions Board for examination. The Army Pensions Board is a statutory independent Board appointed to investigate disability applications under the Army Pensions Acts and to report to the Minister thereon. The convening of the Board is subject to the availability of the members and the Board deals with all disability pension applications in chronological order.

The individual in this case has been seen by the Army Pensions Board, which has provided a report to the Department. A number of issues were subsequently referred to the Board for clarification. Following consideration of the Board's response it is expected that a decision will be reached shortly and the Department will be in touch with the applicant.

Departmental Contracts Data

2284. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the contracts awarded to a company (details supplied) per annum since March 2011, in tabular form by his Department or agency or body under the aegis of his Department; the cost per contract; the basis for each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27449/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There were no contracts awarded to the company referred to by the Deputy by my Department or agency or body under aegis of my Department during the period covered by the question.

Military Archives

2285. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if all records pertaining to the siege of Jadotville in 1961 remain within the military archives. [27509/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised by the military authorities that any archival material relating to the Siege of Jadotville, as part of the Defence Forces deployment on Peacekeeping duties with the United Nations, deposited with Military Archives remains under the custody and control of the Officer in Charge of Military Archives. The Military Archives can only certify that which has been deposited with the Military Archives and is in its possession.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

2286. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the num-

ber of persons in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27623/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table sets out the current strength (Whole Time Equivalent) of the Permanent Defence Force across the three branches, as of the 30 th April, 2017 (the latest date for which figures are available):

Branch	Current Strength
Army	7,290
Air Corps	707
Naval Service	1,065
Total	9,062

The Government is committed to maintaining the establishment of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. On an ongoing basis, the manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. As with other areas of the public service, challenges have arisen in relation to the recruitment and retention of personnel in particular areas of expertise. I am advised by the military authorities that their planned target is to induct approximately 850 new entrants to the Defence Forces across all services and competition streams in 2017. A new General Service Recruitment campaign was launched on 23 February 2017 and the 2017 Cadetship competition was launched in March 2017. Direct Entry Competitions are also held as required from which specialist appointments are filled. An Air Corps apprentice class was also inducted in March 2017. Promotions are ongoing within Officer ranks in order to fill rank vacancies. A new NCO promotions competition to fill vacancies to the ranks of Sergeants and above has been launched from which promotions will commence in Q3 2017. I remain committed to increasing recruitment to the Defence Forces and it is my intention that targeted recruitment will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence and in the context of the policy parameters on recruitment set out in the White Paper on Defence.

Defence Forces Recruitment

2287. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when the Defence Forces will be accepting applications for cadets and general service personnel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27625/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel, as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. I am advised by the Military Authorities that the Defence Forces are planning to induct 850 new entrants across all services and competition streams in 2017. The 2017 Cadet Competition was launched on 22 Mar 2017 for four weeks with a closing date of 18 Apr 2017. The competition has now progressed through the Application stage to the Assessment Centre stage which involves Group Assessment, Fitness Tests and a Realistic Job Preview. Cadet inductions are planned to take place in September 2017.

20 June 2017

General Service Recruitment Campaigns for both the Army and Naval Service were launched on 23 Feb 2017 for 6 weeks with a closing date of 5 Apr 2017. The competitions have now progressed through the Application and Online Psychometric Assessment stages to Fitness Testing and Competency Based Interviews. Inductions from the 2017 General Service competitions will commence in Q3 2017.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, it is intended to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

Departmental Expenditure

2288. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount his Department or a body under its aegis has paid to a company (details supplied) for advice, the use of intellectual property and other services. [27706/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): No payments were made by my Department, or a body under its aegis, to the company referred to by the Deputy in the period from January 2011.

Appointments to State Boards

2289. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if any former Members have been appointed to State boards under his remit by the Public Appointments Service; if so, the names and positions of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28212/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Public Appointments Service has not appointed any former T.D. to the Army Pensions Board, the only State body under the aegis of the Department of Defence.

Commemorative Events

2290. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his department will provide funding for a commemoration event (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28031/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence does not have a budget for commemorations. This is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Postal Codes

2291. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount spent by his Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode system in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [28136/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): There has been no cost incurred by this Department on designing, implementing and supporting the Eircode

system. My Department's financial systems already have the functionality to capture and maintain postcode data.

Defence Forces Deployment

2292. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the role and resources of the Army Ranger Wing will be broadened and increased in view of recent terrorist attacks in Britain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28234/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence (2015) is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Army Ranger Wing (ARW) are the Special Operations Forces of the Defence Forces. In this context, the ARW are trained and equipped to undertake a range of specialist roles.

The White Paper on Defence (2015) sets out the capability agenda for the Defence Forces for the next decade. It contains a commitment to further enhance the capabilities of the ARW. Work to identify a range of options in this regard is ongoing as part of the implementation of the White Paper.

Pension Provisions

2293. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 668 of 11 January 2012, in relation to a person (details supplied) who suffered severe PTSD during their time on active duty for the defence forces in the 1970s and owing to poor mental health did not apply for their army pension within the statutory deadline, if he will review all of the documentation on file within his Department regarding this persons application; and as part of that review if he or one of his officials will meet with the person to discuss the case with a view to granting a retrospective military pension on exceptional grounds. [28629/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Army Pensions Acts provide for consideration of claims in respect of a disablement due to:

(a) a wound or injury attributable to service in the Defence Forces, provided that the application is made within a year from the date of discharge from the Defence Forces;

(b) disease attributable to, aggravated by, accelerated or excited by overseas service with a United Nation Force provided that the application is made within eight years from the date of discharge from the Defence Forces.

The above time limits for making an application are statutory deadlines and there is no discretion in the Acts to extend them.

My officials have further reviewed the case of the individual referred to in the Deputy's question.

Unfortunately, the position remains that the time limits are set out in the Army Pensions Act and there is no discretion in the legislation to extend them. In the circumstances, it is not open to me to accept an application at this stage in this case. Even if it were possible to do so, it would

be extremely difficult, some 38 years after his discharge, to establish the required causal link between his medical condition and his military service.

I regret I cannot be of more assistance. In the circumstances, I do not feel that a meeting would serve any purpose.

State Bodies Code of Conduct

2294. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if all State bodies under the aegis of his Department have furnished a report confirming the State body has complied with its obligations under tax law for 2015 and 2016 as required under the code of practice for the governance of State bodies; the action which was taken regarding those bodies that did not submit such requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28666/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The only State body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. The Army Pensions Board does not have its own budget; all expenditure and financial transactions relating to it are administered by my Department through the Army Pensions Vote, Vote 35.

Army Barracks

2295. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if sewerage and waste water from all buildings within a barracks (details supplied) in County Galway is connected into the Galway city sewerage system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28796/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Sewerage and waste water from all buildings in Dún Ui Mhaoiliosa (Renmore) Barracks, Galway are connected into the Galway City sewerage system.

The Department of Defence in a licence agreement dated 4 February 1975 permitted Galway County Council to lay a sewer through Department lands adjacent to Dún Ui Mhaoiliosa (Renmore) Barracks, Galway. In accordance with the terms of the licence, Galway County Council is fully responsible for the sewer.

Departmental Staff Relocation

2296. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of staff under the remit of his Department who have applied to be transferred to Department or State agency offices located outside the Dublin region in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the estimated average cost incurred for each staff member that relocated outside the Dublin region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29035/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence is largely a decentralised Department with offices in Newbridge, Galway and Roscrea. The Department does not hold specific details in relation to staff who may be seeking to transfer from the Department to other locations.

Departmental Staff Data

2297. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of staff employed in his Department and in each State agency under the aegis of his Department, by county, in tabular form. [29250/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I can confirm that the number of civil servants in my Department including State Boards and/or Agencies, by county, as at 29 May 2017 is as follows:

County/Location	Number of Civil Servants
Co. Kildare	168
Co. Galway	134
Co. Tipperary	26
Dublin City	12
Co Cork	2
Total staff by county:	342

In addition, 5 staff are serving in Brussels, bringing the total number to 347 as at 29 May, 2017.