

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 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Food Industry Development

12. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which he expects to be in a position to ensure the future of the food producing sector notwithstanding developments surrounding Brexit; if he expects to adopt new or specific policies in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28163/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agri-food 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 sectoral recommendations.

The implementation process for any strategy is vital for its success. Minister Creed chairs 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.

The UK's decision to leave the EU reinforces the need to develop as many outlets for our agri-food exports as possible, in order to minimise our dependence on any one market. Indeed this principle of market development is already a key component of Food Wise. We have been very active in recent years in efforts to diversify markets, and in aiming to respond to consumer demands in emerging markets.

The challenges linked to Brexit are immense, given the very close trading relationships between Ireland and the United Kingdom and on the island of Ireland. We are determined to work closely with the industry and with other Governments to identify strategies and approaches that will maintain the success of the Irish agri-food and drinks sector.

I will launch Steps to Success 2017, the second progress report on Food Wise 2025, of next month.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

13. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of GLAS and AEOS payments outstanding from 2016 for persons in County Cork. [28011/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Both GLAS and AEOS provide valuable support to farmers to deliver environmental benefits and public goods which will enhance Ireland's sustainability credentials into the future. They provide support to Irish farmers aimed at enhancing biodiversity, water quality and the mitigation of the future impacts of climate change while allowing Irish farmers to improve their agricultural practices.

The GLAS scheme is the latest agri-environment scheme available to farmers. It forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Plan 2014-2020. To date in excess of 50,000 farmers have had applications approved into the Scheme under three different tranches over a fourteen month period. The approval of these farmers into the Scheme has been achieved a year ahead of the original target set when the Scheme was launched.

Over 95% of cases in Cork have been paid and currently the applications of 136 farmers continue to be processed with payment issuing as cases are cleared. The Department has contacted the applicants where further information to support their application is needed and we are awaiting a reply to allow the payment processing to be finalised. The Department is continuing to review cases on an on-going basis and as they are cleared they are processed for payment.

Concerning AEOS the position is that all but 33 farmers in County Cork have been paid and payments issue as files are cleared. As 2016 is the final scheme-year of payment under AEOS 2, 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.

Forestry Sector

14. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of impact assessments that his Department has carried out with regard to the 2014 to 2020 forestry programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27936/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The drafting of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 included the production of a Natura Impact Statement and subsequent appropriate assessment, and this process concluded that the programme did not pose a threat to the integrity of the Natura 2000 network. In parallel to this, a Strategic Environmental Assessment was also carried out. As part of this assessment, an environmental report was drafted, the purpose of which was to evaluate the likely environmental effects of implementation and non-implementation of the draft Forestry Programme. This included an evaluation of realistic strategic alternative approaches and options, as well as suggested mitigation and enhancement measures to prevent, reduce and offset any significant adverse effects on the environment arising from the implementation of the draft programme. Mitigating measures

adopted by the Forestry Programme are listed under Section 6.12 of the programme document itself. All documents are publicly available on the Department's website.

As regards any potential effect of afforestation on land prices, it should be noted that there are many factors which can influence land prices. Some are macro factors such as supply and demand and some are more local. Other factors include the prevailing economic climate, for example, the price of land decreasing as a result of the financial crisis of 2008/2009. There are also regional variations in terms of demand, supply and quality which influence the final price paid for land. To claim that afforestation grants and premium rates are responsible for driving up the price of all land types across the entire country overlooks the complexity that exists within the land market.

With regard to the economic aspects of forestry, I firmly believe that the sector is good for our economy and in particular, good for our people living in rural communities. Forestry generates economic activity in rural areas where other sectors of our economy cannot reach. It helps create sustainable and vibrant communities by supporting jobs throughout the forest cycle including planting, fencing, thinning, forest roading, harvesting and transportation, and replanting, and of course through the related nursery and processing sectors. In addition, numerous jobs are supported indirectly throughout rural communities, from machinery sales to local shops.

Coillte Teoranta

15. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he last met with Coillte; if he will report on the discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27973/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My most recent meeting with Coillte was on 10 April 2017 in Macroom, Co. Cork, at the launch of Coillte Premium Partners', Coillte's new private forestry partnership product. I met with both the Chairman of the Coillte Board, Mr. John Moloney, and the company's CEO, Mr. Fergal Leamy, at the event. This contact is of course in addition to ongoing contact on operational and policy issues between Coillte and officials in my Department.

One of the challenges facing the Irish forestry sector is the mobilisation of the private timber resource. 'Forests, products and people – Ireland's forest policy – a renewed vision' indicates that timber mobilisation will play an increasing priority role, if forecasts of roundwood production, especially from the private sector are to be achieved.

The 'Coillte Premium Partners' which we discussed at our last meeting is a private forestry partnership product where the forestry partners retain ownership of their land while having direct access to Coillte's forest management expertise, operational capacity, planning systems, certification and sales channels. Our timber processing sector, which provides both direct and indirect employment in rural communities, require a consistent supply of good quality timber so the wider impacts of such a scheme are timber mobilization and local employment. I was therefore pleased to launch the scheme which has the potential to support Irish forest owners and create new value in the rural economy through the mobilisation of timber from privately owned forests.

I also spoke with the CEO of Coillte last month in relation to the wildfires which occurred on Coillte lands at the beginning of May, most notably in Cloosh Valley, Co. Galway. These outbreaks were very serious, with implications for lives, livelihoods, homes, property, forests

and wildlife.

My colleague, Minister of State Doyle, who is the Minister of State at my Department with responsibility for forestry, subsequently visited the site of the Cloosh Valley wildfire on Monday, 15 May 2017, where I understand he met with Coillte personnel, including Coillte's Director of Forest Operations. As the Deputy will recall, an extensive wildfire raged in Cloosh Valley from the weekend of 6th May 2017 until it was eventually brought under control on Thursday 11th May 2017, resulting in the estimated loss of some 1,500 hectares of forestry and 1,000 hectares of bogland. During his visit, Minister of State Doyle saw firsthand the extent of the damage caused with the fire, its spread and the efforts to control it being the subject of the discussions.

Fishing Licences

16. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the progress made on the implementation of a heritage licence in the inshore fisheries sector which was a recommendation of the report on sustainable island and fishing communities published in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27933/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I presume the Deputy is referring to recommendation 10 of the Report on Promoting Sustainable Rural Coastal and Island Communities of the former Joint Sub-Committee on Fisheries published in January 2014. That recommendation stated:

The sub-Committee recommends that the Government examines the feasibility of 'heritage licences' to be issued by the Department for rural coastal and island communities. Such licences would, optimally facilitate traditional fishing practices in conjunction with the establishment of a producer organisation representing vessels under a certain LOA in these designated areas.

I understand that this recommendation arose in relation to requests for special concessions for certain groups to fish commercially for wild salmon. Such matters are proper to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment who retains responsibility for Inland Fisheries including management of wild salmon stocks.

While establishment of producer organisations is a matter for industry participants themselves, funding is available under the European and Maritime Fisheries Fund for which my Department is the Managing Authority.

On the matter of the Inshore Fisheries sector, the National Inshore Fisheries Forum is now the established arena for setting sectoral priorities and discussion on proposals to enhance the sustainability of that sector. I am particularly encouraged by recent steps the Forum is taking to initiate the development of an Inshore Fisheries Strategy which will help to guide the work of the Forums in improving the opportunities available to the sector overall.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

17. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the situation in which the agriculture cashflow loan support scheme was used as stocking loans to farmers in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27967/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Last month I welcomed the release of preliminary information from the Strategic Banking Corporation of

Ireland (SBCI) regarding the uptake of the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme. The Scheme, which was developed by my Department in co-operation with SBCI, makes €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low-cost, flexible source of working capital and allows them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises. The SBCI reported that €60.2m has been drawn down by farmers to the end of April. The average loan size is €32,000, with more than half the loans being advanced for terms of four years or more.

The Scheme was devised to be as flexible as possible and it was up to the applicant to decide the purpose for which they used the loan according to the circumstances of the farming enterprise. Finance for trading stock is a normal working capital requirement for farmers and was eligible under the Scheme. The objective of the Scheme was to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors by lowering the cost of finance. There is a significant cost saving for those who decided to use this Scheme as a stocking loan.

I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low-cost flexible finance. I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future.

The banks advise that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. My Department is expecting another update on the progress of the Scheme from the SBCI shortly.

Fish Quotas

18. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the implementation of the landing obligation; the reason over quota catches are being taken from the national quota for the following year and not from the individual person that incurs the over quota catch; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27934/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Common Fisheries Policy, the landing obligation - which prohibits the wasteful practice of discarding of fish at sea - is being phased in over a 4 year period. The first phase, concerning pelagic stocks, came into effect on 1 January 2015. The landing obligation was extended to certain demersal stocks (whitefish and prawns) from 1 January 2016 and will be fully phased in for all quota species by 1 January 2019.

The phasing process is agreed by Member States in a particular area in consultation with the relevant Advisory Councils which consist of industry and NGO stakeholders. For North Western Waters the Member States involved are Ireland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the UK and Spain.

195 Irish vessels are currently obliged to land some species depending on where they fish and the type of gear they use. In order to assist skippers with the rollout, my Department and the marine agencies have actively engaged with industry including hosting information workshops.

In Ireland, quotas are a public resource and are managed by the Minister to ensure that property rights are not granted to individual operators. In 2016 some individual operators exceeding their quota allocations; however I was able, in consultation with Industry representatives, to

secure quota swaps with other Member States to keep most stocks within permitted limits.

In December 2016 I sought to introduce a voluntary quota balancing system for the RSW Pelagic Segment Mackerel Fishery, but to date full agreement has not been reached with relevant Producer Organisations.

My Department is also working to introduce a new quota balancing system. This will initially involve consultation with Industry representatives prior to full public consultation. The proposed arrangements are intended to operate as a pilot scheme initially in relation to pelagic stocks with a view to further development and amendment as experience informs.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Eligibility

19. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the programme for Government permitting young farmers that are under 40 years of age that have been farming for more than five years from accessing measures under CAP for young farmers including being able to apply for the national reserve and for top up entitlements; the reason for their exclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28156/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Regulations governing the operation of the National Reserve include an optional provision whereby Member States may use the National Reserve to allocate new entitlements or give a top-up on the value of existing entitlements for persons who suffer from a specific disadvantage.

In the context of the discussions with the EU Commission in early 2015 regarding the inclusion of the group referred to as Old Young Farmers under the 2015 National Reserve, the EU Commission advised that the inclusion of groups under ‘Specific Disadvantage’ category of the National Reserve would require individual approval at EU level.

The National Reserve in 2017 was established using funding derived from a linear cut to the value of all farmers’ entitlements. EU Regulations pertaining to the National Reserve provide that the two categories of young farmer and new entrant to farming must receive priority access to the Reserve. In the context of the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, Ireland consulted with the EU Commission regarding the possibility of including the Forgotten Farmer group under the specific disadvantage category of the 2017 National Reserve. The EU Commission confirmed that Member States cannot use the proceeds of a linear cut to fund a specific disadvantage category of the National Reserve.

The Commission confirmed that the only funding option for the specific disadvantage category is natural replenishment of the Reserve, such as unused entitlements or the proceeds of clawback, but only after the two priority categories of young farmer and new entrant to farming have been catered for.

Food Industry Development

20. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports which are available from his Department to support strawberry growers here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27974/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The strawberry sector has invested significantly over recent years to improve the quality and consistency

of output.

Traditionally Irish strawberry production was centered on field based production with harvesting very much concentrated in the traditional June-July period. At that stage the majority of the crop was destined for low value processing. While production still peaks in summer, Irish strawberry growers have made significant investments on their farms to extend the season and to produce high quality fruit from early April right through to mid-November largely using polythene based protective cropping structures.

Growers are currently enjoying very strong growth in consumer demand for strawberries and my Department is facilitating development of the sector and providing supports to strawberry growers in a number of different ways.

My Department has supported this development through the availability of grant aid under the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector. This nationally funded competitive scheme facilitates capital investments in horticulture specific equipment or buildings by providing aid at a rate of up to 40% (50% for applicants under 35) for approved investments.

156 applicants were approved under the 2017 Round of the Scheme with a total of €6.4m in aid approved. Within these figures there were 25 approvals relating to investments in the soft fruit and protected food crop sector with in excess of €1.5m in aid approved for this sector alone. A significant proportion of these approvals relate to strawberry growers investing to expand their production capacity and/or improve the quality of their produce.

Strawberry growers are also eligible to receive EU Aid through participation in the EU Fruit and Vegetable Producer Organisation (PO) Scheme. The objective of this EU funded scheme is to encourage growers to come together to strengthen their position in the market in the face of increased concentration of demand by the retail multiples. Under this scheme each PO implements an approved Operational Programme over 3-5 years. Eligible actions included in the Operational Programme can have the objective of improving product marketing and/or quality, aligning production with consumer demand or using environmentally beneficial production methods.

Although there are two active fruit/vegetable PO's at present in Ireland no Irish strawberry grower is participating in a PO. The EU legislation governing this scheme has recently been updated and simplified. In line with FoodWise 2025 my Department is committed to facilitating the development of fruit or vegetable PO's.

My Department is also responsible for enforcing the EU legislation relating to the quality and labeling of fresh fruit and vegetables. These standards cover a number of technical quality parameters, however country of origin labeling is the most important aspect for most consumers and all Irish strawberry producers. My Department conducts inspections throughout the fruit and vegetable distribution chain, at import, wholesale and retail level to verify compliance with this legislation thereby ensuring that consumers can make informed decisions regarding their purchases of strawberries and other fruit/vegetables.

The State also supports the strawberry sector through Teagasc's specialised advisory and education services. In addition Bord Bia funds a number of promotional events for the sector. This year was the 10th year of National Strawberry Week which has now been re-branded as "Celebrate Strawberry Week." Co-funded by Bord Bia and the Irish Strawberry industry this promotion campaign aims to highlight the health benefits of strawberries as well as increasing consumer demand through a range of communication channels.

Strawberries have recorded phenomenal growth in sales in the last few years. Based on Bord Bia figures retail strawberry sales have grown by 13.5% in the 12-month period to end of March 2017. The Irish market consumed a total of 9,600 tonnes of strawberries in this period with a retail value of €91 million. Over two thirds of these strawberries were Irish grown.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

21. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures his Department is taking to reduce the emissions from the agriculture sector; if a projection has been carried out by his Department in relation to emissions reduction from the agricultural sector in 2020, 2030 and 2050; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21868/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The historic Paris Agreement in December 2015 recognises the need to limit global temperature increases to 2050, to less than 2 degrees and to pursue an objective of limiting increases to less than 1.5 degrees. It also recognises that this must be achieved in a manner that does not threaten food production (Article 2). This reflects the need for a coherent approach to the twin challenges of climate change and food security. From the forestry perspective of land use, the Paris Agreement includes a strong recognition of the role of forests in mitigating climate change.

This aligns with the Government's long-term ambition for the sector- an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. In effect, carbon-neutral agriculture aspires to balancing agricultural emissions with carbon-sequestration, reducing emissions from land sector, increasing fossil fuel displacement and materials displacement.

With this in mind, we are correct to seek to maintain one of Europe's most sustainable forms of food production - the Irish family farm.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department and its agencies have been strongly focussed on improving the efficiency of Irish farming which is fundamental to reducing emissions. We are focused on improving animal, grassland and nutrient management and have invested heavily in a number of schemes and measures such as the Origin Green initiative, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme and our Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. Our knowledge transfer programmes are key to bringing the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers.

These strategies have led to a significant decoupling of production output and emissions, with current analysis suggesting that the emissions intensity per kcal of food output in 2013 had reduced by approximately 14% relative to 2005.

FoodWise 2025 includes clear and comprehensive commitments to managing the projected growth in the Irish agri-food sector in a sustainable way. The guiding principle underpinning this projected growth is that environmental protection and economic competitiveness will be considered as equal and complementary, one will not be achieved at the expense of the other.

FoodWise provides a framework for the agri sector to engage with the National Mitigation Plan and for the development of a common vision of transition to a low carbon future.

There is also a strong commitment to measuring and monitoring the sustainability credentials of the sector. As part of the implementation phase of FoodWise, an Environmental Sustainability Committee has been established. This implementation process will include evaluation

and assessment of the delivery of sustainability and mitigation actions.

All of these efforts are being implemented alongside an extensive afforestation scheme. Afforestation is the main cost effective land based climate mitigation tool available to Ireland, followed by the above mentioned technologies in agriculture itself. Climate change mitigation by forests, forest fuels and wood products is one of the principal drivers of the policy to expand forest cover out to mid century. Agriculture and afforestation are intrinsically linked in Ireland, with every new hectare of afforestation comes directly from agriculture.

My Department will continue to actively engage in the whole of government approach on climate policy to examine the best means of encouraging sustainable intensification of food production, while optimising the sectors contribution to greenhouse gas mitigation and sequestration including through afforestation and other forest sector activities.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

22. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the review of the areas of natural constraint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28150/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Rural Development Regulation each Member State must designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. The ANC scheme replaces the previous Disadvantaged Areas Scheme / Less Favoured Areas Scheme. The designation of eligible areas under these schemes to date has been based on a range of socio-economic factors. From 2018 eligible areas must instead be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria. In cases where a Member State does not introduce this new system for payment, the old scheme remains in place but payments must phase out on a digressive basis.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation are:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope.

My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on sourcing and analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. Department officials have also been in contact with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and DG Agri in the EU Commission in relation to technical issues arising. This analysis will identify areas deemed to be facing natural constraints, which will in parallel be subjected to a refinement process.

In parallel to this process, it is also possible to designate areas as ‘areas of specific con-

straint' where it is deemed necessary for land management to be continued in order to conserve or improve the environment, maintain the countryside, preserve the tourist potential of the area, or protect the coastline. The potential use of this designation is being considered as part of the overall redesignation project. It is envisaged that stakeholders will be consulted as this process develops.

GLAS Expenditure

23. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the commitment made by his Department to spend €250 million per year on GLAS when the scheme is fully subscribed will be delivered in 2017; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28155/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Both the GLAS and AEOS agri-environment schemes provide valuable support to farmers to deliver environmental benefits and public goods which will enhance Ireland's sustainability credentials into the future. They provide support to Irish farmers aimed at enhancing biodiversity, water quality and the mitigation of the future impacts of climate change while allowing Irish farmers to improve their agricultural practices.

The GLAS scheme is the latest agri-environment scheme available to farmers and is part of Ireland's Rural Development Plan 2014-2020. To date in excess of 50,000 farmers have had applications approved into the Scheme under three different tranches over a fourteen month period. The approval of this level of farmers into the Scheme has been achieved a year ahead of the original target set when the Scheme was launched.

I firmly believe that this level of participation in GLAS demonstrates Irish farmers commitment to the sustainable growth of the Irish agri-food sector into the future. It clearly shows that Irish producers recognise that future growth must be based on the principle that economic benefits are complementary, compatible and equal to the environmental protection and enhancement of the resources needed to produce the high quality, safe and healthy produced by them.

The commitment of Irish farmers to sustainable agriculture production and the protection of the environment is fully supported by the financial provisions in the RDP 2014-2020. So while the full annual expenditure for GLAS will only be known when 2017 payments for all three tranches of the scheme (GLAS 1, 2 and 3) have been processed together for the first time in the final quarter of this year, I am confident that all of the expenditure provided for in Ireland's RDP 2014-2020 for agri-environment measures will be used.

Brexit Issues

24. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department has carried out an evaluation of the impact of Brexit on the various aspects of the agri-food producing and business sectors including the need to retain existing provisions for the equine industry vis a vis Ireland, the UK and France; the extent to which alternatives can be examined in the event of difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28164/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department and its agencies have conducted various analyses of the likely impact of Brexit on the 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, for example through 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, the most recent of which I held only last week in respect of the equine and greyhound industries.

I have already referred in some length in earlier replies to the range of short- and long-term impacts likely to arise as a result of Brexit, to the measures that I have already taken in order to help mitigate the short-term impacts, and to the ongoing work being undertaken by myself and my Department in relation to dealing with the longer-term impacts.

From the point of view of the equine industry, I would point out that my Department has been in regular contact with Irish equine industry stakeholders in order to fully understand the potential implications of Brexit for the sector. The sector is represented on the Department's Stakeholder Consultative Committee, which met most recently on 11 April, and, as I mentioned, was the focus of the latest of the five sectoral dialogues that I have hosted under the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, which took place in Portlaoise last week. This event provided myself and my Department with an invaluable further opportunity to tease out these issues in some detail, and to consider possible responses, and 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.

I am very aware of the potential threats that Brexit represents to many areas of the agri-food sector, but I remain very focused on supporting the industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop in order to ensure that the issues faced across all sectors, including the equine sector, are fully understood and addressed.

Nitrates Usage

25. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures which will be put in place by his Department in order to assist farmers due to the new EU rules governing slurry spreading and the use of splash plates. [29244/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is 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 on a total ban on splash plates. My Department continues to liaise closely with colleagues in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment on this matter.

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.

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, I fully understand that this technology is not suitable for all farms.

Sugar Industry

26. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether the loss of sugar beet production has represented a significant disadvantage to tillage farmers; if he will take proactive steps to revive the industry in view of the fact that farming in the UK is proceeding in this direction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27977/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): By way of explanation I would like to give the Deputy a short background to this issue. A temporary restructuring scheme was introduced with the aim of reducing EU sugar production. Greencore, the holder of the entire Irish sugar quota, availed of this voluntary scheme, dismantled its facilities and ceased production in 2006. Ireland secured €353 million as part of the reform package of which €220 million went to beet growers, €127 million to Greencore and €6 million to machinery contractors.

In 2011 my Department officials met with two separate groups which had conducted feasibility studies into the possibility of establishing a new sugar and bioethanol production facility, using sugar beet, in this country. The figures published by the interested groups who are investigating the possibility of building a new facility, indicate that the overall capital costs involved could range from €250 million to €400 million, depending on what type of facility would be constructed.

My Department officials informed both groups at the time, and many times since, that any venture to develop a combined sugar/bioethanol production facility in Ireland, would have to be a viable commercial proposition, and supported by a sufficiently robust business case in order to attract the funding from investors for the very substantial capital investment required. My Government colleague Minister Coveney informed both groups at the time that it was his job to look for agreement at EU level to allow for the growing of sugar beet for the manufacture of sugar, at the earliest possible date.

In this connection, he secured agreement as part of the overall CAP reform package at the final EU Council of Agriculture Ministers, which he chaired in June 2013, to abolish all sugar quotas by 30 September 2017. This agreement removes, with effect from 1 October 2017, the current EU quota barrier for operators in Ireland or other Member State, wishing to re-establish a sugar industry.

The current Programme for a Partnership Government makes clear that “State enterprise bodies will be asked to examine any substantial business plans related to rebuilding the industry with a view to considering appropriate State supports”. It is now up to those interested parties to move the project forward and to garner sufficient commercial and financial support to turn their plans into a viable reality.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

27. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a second tranche of a low cost loan scheme administered through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and the commercial banks; if he will revise the terms and conditions of eligibility for participating persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27978/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors. Last month I welcomed the release of preliminary information from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) regarding the uptake of the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme. The Scheme, which was developed by my Department in co-operation with SBCI, makes €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, allowing them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

SBCI used the €25 million of public funding provided by my Department to leverage the total amount of €150 million and, along with the European Investment Fund’s ‘COSME’ (the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs), is providing the guarantee required to underpin the loan’s flexibility and lower the cost of the loans. My Department’s contribution of €25 million includes €11 million from the EU’s ‘exceptional adjustment aid for milk and other livestock farmers’. It was this exceptional aid package which facilitated the Scheme from an EU State Aid perspective and a second tranche is not possible under this particular arrangement. Other sectors, such as tillage and horticulture, were facilitated by national funding under the ‘de minimis’ State Aid rules.

The SBCI reported that €60.2m has been drawn down by farmers to the end of April. The average loan size is €32,000, with more than half the loans being advanced for terms of four years or more.

I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance. I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future.

The banks advise that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. My Department is expecting another update on the progress of the Scheme from the SBCI shortly.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

28. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he is dealing with the land eligibility issues raised by an association (details supplied) for persons under the direct payment and scheme systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27935/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2015 my Department published the “A Guide to Land Eligibility” booklet, which issued to all farmers, detailing all of the requirements that applicants must comply with to ensure that their land is and remains eligible for payment.

The land declared by an applicant under the various EU funded area-based schemes must be eligible agricultural land and must also have an agricultural activity carried out on the land.

The governing EU regulations set out a range of actions to define agricultural activity and maintaining it in a state suitable for grazing and cultivation. In Ireland we chose from the legal framework to go with a characteristics-based approach. Therefore an applicant is free to choose the method which best suits their farming operation to ensure that the land is suitable for grazing or cultivation. Furthermore we also exercised the option to deem what is known as “Permanent Grassland Established Local Practices” (PGELP) land eligible and hence the definition of permanent pasture that is implemented in Ireland allows for the wide variety of grazing ground that exists in the State.

The main guiding principles for determining land as eligible include:

- The land is agricultural;
- The land is not abandoned;
- Ineligible features, e.g. buildings, areas of water bodies, scrub, rock, have been excluded from the area declared;
- There must be evidence that the applicant is maintaining the agricultural area.

With specific regard to Natura land, the “Guide to Land Eligibility” booklet details the provision set out in EU regulations where land that was eligible in the past and has now become ineligible, due to compliance with the requirements of the birds and habitats directives, can be considered for payment subject to specific criteria being met. However this provision can only apply where the farmer is still farming the land and the land is fundamentally an agricultural area.

In relation to a finding of land not being eligible (e.g. in the case of burnt land), the regulations clearly allow for penalties not to be imposed where the applicant can demonstrate that he or she is not at fault for the non-compliance.

However, my Department is constrained by EU regulations which require these exceptions to be interpreted narrowly. In the case of eligibility requirements it would be for the applicant to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Department that such exceptional circumstances arise. This may require, where appropriate, the applicant to demonstrate that all reasonable measures have been taken to prevent such damage. My Department will examine every such case on an individual basis to determine if these exceptions are applicable.

My Department implements the relevant EU regulations in relation to land eligibility in a fair and balanced manner, having due regard to all other relevant EU legislation. I can assure the Deputy that there has been no change to the criteria used to establish land eligibility since the publication of the 2015 Guide to Land Eligibility.

Fishing Industry

29. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to review the atypical worker permit for non-EU migrant fishing crew; if such a review is planned; and if he will meet representatives from the international transport federation that have concerns regarding the welfare of non-EU migrant fishing crew operating on Irish vessels. [28072/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The matters which arose in relation to non-EEA workers in the fishing industry required a cross-Departmental and cross-agency response. The Government set up an inter-Departmental Task Force to examine the issues involved.

The main recommendation of the report of the Task Force was the establishment of a sector-specific Atypical Worker Permission system which is an extension of the existing Atypical Worker Permission schemes administered by the Department of Justice and Equality (Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service – INIS). The purpose of this scheme is to provide a structured and transparent framework for the employment of non-EEA workers within defined segments of the Irish commercial sea-fishing fleet. This system was established and is operated through the co-operative efforts of the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

The scheme has been in operation for just over a year and therefore further time is needed to allow the scheme to become established and to deliver on its objectives.

In tandem with the development of this scheme, under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 11 Departments and Agencies were brought together and developed a Memorandum of Understanding to underpin the monitoring and enforcement of the scheme.

The role of my Department, in relation to this scheme, is solely in respect of maintaining the Central Depository of contracts and supporting documentation submitted under the Scheme, in order to ensure that the cap of 500 is not exceeded in any 12 month period. The Department of Justice and Equality retains responsibility for immigration matters under the scheme while the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) put in place, which is led by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation with relevant State enforcement bodies, provides for a rigorous and effective inspection system.

Aquaculture Development

30. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will publish the report on the aquaculture licensing process; his plans to legislate on its recommendations; his views on the recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27975/17]

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.

Dairy Sector

31. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the EU Commission's plans in relation to skimmed milk powder intervention stocks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27966/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): While 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. This was due to a combination of factors including increased global supply, the effects of the Russian ban on the import of EU agri-food products and reduced global demand, notably for dairy products in China.

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 welcomed some of the measures adopted by the Commission during this period. Key among these measures was the buying of skimmed milk powder (SMP) into intervention. Ireland's industry placed some 36,000 tonnes of product 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. Currently there are over 350,000 tonnes of SMP in intervention across the EU.

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.

The process of tendering for release of product back onto the market commenced in December 2016. There was a single tendering round in December 2016 and multiple tendering rounds throughout 2017 thus far. On each occasion the Commission has adopted a cautious approach. Only 40 tonnes in total has been released thus far, and this was at the first tendering event in December 2016. The tendering events since December have seen all offers rejected on the basis of what were deemed insufficient offers, often significantly below the market price for the stock. This approach has been supported unanimously by Member States, including Ireland.

It is critically important that the release of these stocks is managed in a way that does not destabilise 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.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme

32. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the ANC review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28160/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Rural Development Regulation each Member State must designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. The ANC scheme replaces the previous Disadvantaged Areas Scheme/Less Favoured Areas Scheme. The designation of eligible areas under these schemes to date has been based on a range of socio-economic factors. From 2018 eligible areas must instead be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria. In cases where a Member State does not introduce this new system for payment, the old scheme remains in place but payments must phase out on a digressive basis.

The biophysical criteria set out in the legislation to underpin the new system of designation are:

- Low temperature
- Dryness
- Excess soil moisture
- Limited soil drainage
- Unfavourable texture and stoniness
- Shallow rooting depth
- Poor chemical properties
- Steep slope.

My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on sourcing and analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. Department officials have also been in contact with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and DG Agri in the EU Commission in relation to technical issues arising. This analysis will identify areas deemed to be facing natural constraints, which will in parallel be subjected to a refinement process.

In parallel to this process, it is also possible to designate areas as ‘areas of specific constraint’ where it is deemed necessary for land management to be continued in order to conserve or improve the environment, maintain the countryside, preserve the tourist potential of the area, or protect the coastline. The potential use of this designation is being considered as part of the overall redesignation project. It is envisaged that stakeholders will be consulted as this process develops.

Bord na gCon Funding

33. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he approved the €23 million of Exchequer funding that went to Bord na gCon in the State

purchase of the former Harold's Cross greyhound stadium; his views on whether the agreed price was value for money for the land in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28157/17]

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 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.

Agrifood Sector

34. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the agri sector ahead of Brexit and particularly in view of the UK election result; his views on whether the outcome of the UK election will change Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28159/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I fully recognise the potential difficulties that may arise in the agri-food and fisheries sectors from the Brexit vote. These sectors are of critical importance to our economy given their regional spread and the fact that they underpin the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. I am determined to safeguard the interests of these vital sectors.

My Department and its agencies have conducted various analyses of the likely impact of Brexit on the 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. 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 dedicated Brexit Unit and a Brexit Response Committee to prepare for, monitor and respond to developments as required. As referred to earlier, I have also created a Stakeholder Consultative Committee, which is complemented by frequent contact with representative organisations and companies on an ongoing basis, and operates in parallel to the separate consultation structures under the All-Island Civic Dialogue.

Last October, as part of Budget 2017, I announced a range of measures aimed at alleviating exchange rate volatility pressures. These included the 'Agri Cashflow Support' loan fund of €150 million, enhanced taxation measures, and the allocation of additional funding to Bord Bia in order to ensure that it is in a position to provide Brexit-related supports to affected companies, including its new Brexit Barometer. I also provided for increased funding under the Rural Development Programme and Seafood Development Programme.

I have also held a series of bilateral meetings with my EU counterparts which are aimed at building alliances to ensure that agri-food and fisheries issues are at the top of the EU negotiation agenda. I have been getting a sense of the importance of Brexit for other Member States, and of the degree to which they could support Ireland's efforts to have these issues specifically and adequately taken account of in the negotiations.

In all of these engagements I am 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. In relation to fisheries, Ireland wants to maintain current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal, and to protect our quota share for joint fish stocks

I wish to assure the House that the Government remains 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 for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

In relation to the recent UK election, I think it is too early to make any definitive judgement on what impact the result may have on the UK's approach to Brexit. We have to work on the basis of the information available to us at any point in time, including that coming from the UK Government itself. We have prepared extensively and those preparations are ongoing, and I think we will be ready to respond as appropriate to developments as the negotiation process unfolds.

GLAS Data

35. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of GLAS payments for 2016 which remain outstanding in counties Longford and Westmeath. [27964/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): GLAS pro-

vides valuable support to farmers to deliver environmental benefits and public goods which will enhance Ireland's sustainability credentials into the future. Support is provided to Irish farmers aimed at enhancing biodiversity, water quality and the mitigation of the future impacts of climate change while allowing Irish farmers to improve their agricultural practices.

The GLAS scheme is the latest agri-environment scheme available to farmers. It forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Plan 2014-2020. To date in excess of 50,000 farmers have had applications approved into the Scheme under three different tranches over a fourteen month period. The approval of these farmers into the Scheme has been achieved a year ahead of the original target set when the Scheme was launched.

Almost 97% of cases in both counties have been paid and currently the applications of 26 farmers in Longford and 30 farmers in Westmeath continue to be processed with payment issuing as cases are cleared. The Department has contacted the applicants where further information to support their application is needed and we are awaiting a reply to allow the payment processing to be finalised. The Department is continuing to review outstanding cases on an on-going basis and as they are cleared they are processed for payment.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

36. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the timeframe to introduce a crisis aid fund to tillage farmers that had their crop destroyed due to severe weather in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28154/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I hosted a Tillage Stakeholders Forum on the 16 February, following on from the first one in October 2016, which on both occasions consisted of representatives from all sides of this Sector. Addressing the most recent Forum, I took the opportunity to highlight that one of my priorities has been to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some sectors, which have caused cash flow difficulties for farmers.

Therefore I was pleased to facilitate the "Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme" and last month I welcomed the release of preliminary information from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) regarding its uptake. The Scheme, which was developed by my Department in co-operation with SBCI, makes €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital and allows them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises. The SBCI reported that €60.2m has been drawn down by farmers to the end of April. The average loan size is €32,000, with more than half the loans being advanced for terms of four years or more. SBCI report that some 8% of the loans to date have been drawn down by the tillage sector which is in line with borrowing levels for the sector as a proportion of total agricultural borrowings. The banks advise that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance. I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future. Implementation of this Scheme is subject to the provisions of Commission Regulation (EU) No 1408/2013 (de minimis aid in the agricultural production sector). Support provided under the de minimis regulation complies with State Aid rules in the agriculture sector and does not require prior approval by the EU

Commission.

Under this regulation, I introduced the Tillage Investment Scheme under TAMS II which opened for online applications on the 8 March 2017. The specific areas of investment include Minimum Disturbance Tillage Equipment, Sprayers, Rain Water Harvesting, Grain Storage and Grain dryers. This Tillage Scheme is the latest of the Targeted Modernisation Schemes (TAMS II) to be launched under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The Scheme is co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

All applications must be made on-line, either by the farmer or by an adviser authorised to act on his or her behalf. The closing date for applications under the first tranche of the new scheme is Friday 30 June 2017. A further Tranche will open immediately on the 1 July with a closing date of the 6 October 2017.

As an additional support to cash flow on farms, including Tillage farms, up to **€1.186billion** has been paid out under the Basic Payment Scheme to 124,112 farmers with payments ongoing. Payments of **€202.34million** have also been made to 94,552 applicants under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme.

I can also confirm that a wide ranging discussion took place among all the stakeholders who attended the February meeting of the Tillage Forum, including on the issue of crop losses as a result of the poor harvest conditions of last autumn. My officials have since then had some additional meetings with stakeholders and I will consider further the outcome of those deliberations.

Information and Communications Technology

37. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has reviewed his Department's information technology payments systems in view of the problems faced by persons submitting applications and drawing down payments for GLAS, the KTG scheme, TAMS and so on. [28153/17]

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.

You will be aware from previous discussions in relation to the GLAS scheme that a number of issues delayed payments including:

- declaration by the applicants of an incompatible parcel usage for the GLAS action chosen
- changes in parcel boundaries on which a GLAS action is chosen including splitting or

merging of parcels

- an applicant is no longer claiming the parcel on BPS 2016
- incomplete documentation such as incorrect information on Low-Emission Slurry declaration
- incomplete interim commonage management plans
- incompatible data and parcel history on Department databases

Separately a number of issues arose in relation to the GLAS IT system with additional functionality being required to deal with non standard cases. As advised previously I regret the difficulties that this may have caused to a number of farmers. In direct response to the Deputy's query I am happy to advise that the IT aspect of the delivery of these schemes has been reviewed and a revised team structure has been put in place. This matter will continue to be monitored. All but a very small amount of outstanding work has been addressed and plans are in place to address this over the coming period. The delivery of payments in 2017 is ongoing with GLAS I and II advance payments almost complete. GLAS + Advance Payments in respect of 2016 have issued to the majority of eligible applicants in recent days. In addition, the GLAS I and GLAS II balancing payments are scheduled to issue in the coming weeks subject to the receipt of the applicant's Nutrient Management Plan.

TAMS IT functionality is also available to pay the vast bulk of applicants. A relatively small number of TAMS II applications are subject to penalty and it is expected that payments for the majority of these cases will be issued over the coming weeks.

In relation to the Knowledge Transfer (KT) schemes the Deputy will be aware that I have recently extended the KT deadline to 31st July, which will allow facilitators and vets further time to finalise actions for KT group participants. A recent difficulty with the operation of the new systems provided by my Department for KT Farm Improvement Plans and Animal Health Measures identified has been addressed. I anticipate that payments in this scheme will be made as scheduled for the autumn of this year.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

38. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total sum of money retained from farmers in the beef data genomics scheme in 2016 and to date in 2017; the reason for the retention of these moneys; and the measures taken by his department to ensure that farmers are fully informed as to the reason the retentions are taking place and the way to avoid them in future. [27961/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is approved under article 28 of Regulation 1305/2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. As with all area based rural development schemes the Regulations require that the scheme is of between five and seven years duration. The BDGP I runs for six years from 2015 to 2020.

Almost 30,000 applications to participate in the Programme were received and approximately 23,700 farmers continue to participate.

Payments amounting to almost €51m issued during 2016 to participants in the BDGP of which €14.6m was in respect of 2015 scheme year and €36.3m in respect of the 2016 scheme

year. Approximately €8.7m was paid in respect of training courses and to approved advisors for the completion of carbon navigators for applicants. To date, €41.9m has been paid to 22,578 scheme participants in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

The objectives of BDGP are

- To lower the intensity of GHG emissions by improving the quality and efficiency of the national beef herd.

- To improve the genetic merits of the national beef herd through the collection of data and genotypes of selected animals which will allow for the application of genomic selection in the beef herd.

Applicants were fully informed of their obligations under the Programme through various measures (Terms and Conditions, Helpsheets, Nationwide information meetings, Letters, Texts, Tweets) since the inception of the Programme, and all applicants have completed a comprehensive four hour training course. This course was given by approved advisors and included clear explanation of all the conditions and responsibilities of each applicant under the Programme.

The Department continues to communicate frequently with applicants regarding their responsibilities under the Programme.

Reductions amounting to €0.58m have been applied to the €41.9m already paid under the BDGP in respect of 2016. These are cases where the applicant has been found to be non-compliant with the terms and conditions of the scheme. The application of penalties is in line with the terms and conditions of the scheme.

Forestry Management

39. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase forest cover across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27972/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Planting targets for the next four years are set out under the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020. The programme which represents almost €0.5 billion in State funding, aims to establish almost 44,000 hectares of new forests during this period. In 2015 and 2016 the total area planted was 12,793 hectares which is slightly higher than the target set. Future planting targets along with the afforestation scheme as a whole are currently being examined as part of the midterm review of the programme. The national target is to increase total forest cover to 18% by 2050.

My Department actively promotes afforestation as a land use that can work in support of the existing agricultural activity. For example it is an option for farmers who wish to diversify their income stream or increase profitability while maintaining their agricultural output. Forestry does not necessarily mean a reduction in agricultural output nor does it mean converting the entire farm to forestry. Instead where land is underutilised, it signals a more efficient use of land bringing the entire farm closer to its productive potential. Most importantly this approach introduces a stable and additional income into the farm. This new income stream can be used to develop the farm business as part of the overall plan for the farm. It also of course has multiplier effects for the rural economy and currently supports over 12,000 jobs across the sector.

The current forestry programme introduced changes to the afforestation scheme aimed at increasing planting levels. These changes included the creation of a single premium rate for farm-

ers and non farmers to encourage non farmers to plant. New forest schemes such as agroforestry and forestry for fibre were introduced to allow farmers to plant trees while continuing to have animals graze the land that they had planted. Forestry for fibre also allows farmers to plant trees with much shorter rotations than traditional forestry. Both these schemes are being examined as part of the midterm review where options are being considered to improve their performance.

Dairy Sector

40. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address the ongoing price volatility in the dairy sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27970/17]

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. This was due to a combination of factors including increased global supply, the effects of the Russian ban on the import of EU agri-food products and reduced global demand, notably for dairy products in China.

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. Among the main elements of these packages have been the extension and broadening of more ‘traditional’ support measures such as intervention and aids to private storage, as well as more flexible, targeted, direct aid allocated to Member States to spend in accordance with their national circumstances.

Ireland welcomed and used many of the options provided in the various packages. These include the private storage of cheese, the buying of skimmed milk powder (SMP) into intervention, the payment of direct aid of €26.4 million to dairy producers. Also the advance payment of annual direct payments to all farmers was a welcome provision of cash flow for farmers at a difficult time. In addition, a Milk Production Reduction Scheme, allowed almost 44,000 farmers across the EU (circa 4,000 from Ireland) agreed voluntarily to reduce their milk production, represented significant market stabilising efforts.

Global supply and demand dynamics evolved more favourably as 2016 progressed with a better market environment emerging as a consequence. In spite of these signals of market recovery, the situation remains uncertain in particular product sectors, such as SMP. The long-term fundamentals of the global dairy market are strong. However it is necessary to be cognisant of the on-going challenge of price volatility, which will continue to be a feature of international markets. In this context dairy processors have a significant role to play, with instruments such as fixed price and margin contracts a useful addition to the suite of measures that can be deployed to mitigate the impact of price volatility.

I will continue to work with industry, with other member states and with the EU Institutions to consider how we can refine and improve mechanisms to help farmers to cope with downward price cycles when they arise. In general the outlook for the sector must remain cautiously optimistic, with the resolve to engage in measures to mitigate volatility should it re-emerge.

Fisheries Protection

41. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address concerns that the fisheries industry is in a state of crisis; the measures he is taking

to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27971/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I do not accept that the Irish fishing industry is in a state of crisis. That said, the potential of Brexit to impact negatively on our industry is a matter of very serious concern.

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.

I am, and 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 stakeholders 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.

My aim, in the context of Brexit is to ensure that fisheries remain high on the agenda in the negotiations and that we obtain the best possible outcome for our industry. 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.

In terms of the current state of Irish fisheries, it should be noted that the total value of our quotas for 2017 is a 6% increase on those of 2016. In particular, Ireland obtained increases by volume of 14% and 9% respectively for our two most important fisheries, namely mackerel and prawns.

Afforestation Programme

42. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to change the premium payments for afforestation to ensure that full time farmers receive a higher rate payment than persons that are not dependent on farming for an income; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28151/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the current Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 a single premium rate for farmers and non-farmers was introduced as part of my Department's redesigned afforestation scheme. This means that all applicants, apart from public bodies, are eligible for the same annual premium payment. Up to this point European Council Regulation 1698/2005 on support for rural development had set a higher rate for farmers than for non-farmers. This distinction did not appear in the replacement to this regulation which exists under the current Common Agriculture Policy.

The single premium rate does not diminish in any way the financial benefits that farmers can enjoy if they decide to plant trees. In fact a recent Teagasc study showed that on marginal land switching from some cattle systems to forestry can yield a net gain as high as €228 per hectare for each year of the forest rotation. The net return from changing from a sheep system to forestry is largely similar. This analysis is based on current afforestation grant and premium rates

and on Farm Family Income reported in Teagasc's 2015 National Farm Survey.

The introduction of the single premium rate was designed to make the afforestation scheme more accessible to landowners who were not farming the land themselves; this would include sons and daughters of farmers or other relatives who might have inherited land but who have careers outside of farming. This approach also includes institutional investors such as pension funds, although in these cases having to purchase land first makes forestry a less attractive investment. My Department continues to view the single premium approach as an important strategy in increasing forest cover in Ireland. Our aim in this regard is to achieve forest cover of 18% by 2050. Consequently there are no plans to revert back to an afforestation scheme which offers higher premiums to farmers than to non-farmers and our focus now is working to achieve the targets set out in the Forestry Programme up to 2020.

Agrifood Sector

43. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has spoken to his Northern Irish counterpart regarding the negative impact of a hard border on the agrifood sector in particular. [28824/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I and my officials began engaging with our UK counterparts, including in Northern Ireland, shortly after the Referendum result was announced in June 2016. The Secretary General of my Department met with his UK counterpart in London last September and then met with the Permanent Secretary of Northern Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in October.

Prior to the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly in January 2017, I met with Michelle McIlveen (DUP), the then Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on a number of occasions to discuss the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector. These included more formal engagements in the context of the North-South Ministerial Council, such as those in Armagh last October and at the Plenary meeting in November, as well as ongoing informal contacts.

Officials from my Department continue to engage with their counterparts in DAERA at which discussions are taking place across a number of work streams such as trade, border controls, movement of live animals, plant and animal health (including disease control). The purpose of these engagements is to facilitate a common understanding, for both Departments, of the practical difficulties that stakeholders will face on the ground as Brexit becomes a reality, and allow consideration of mitigating options.

It should also be noted that I have hosted four All Island Sectoral dialogues since last December covering different agriculture enterprises, at which major stakeholders in the Northern Ireland agri food sector attended.

In all of these engagements we discussed the severe implications that a return to a hard border will have on community life in the area, on cross border agri trade and on security; and all agreed that the necessary steps should be taken to avoid such a scenario developing.

I look forward to meeting the new Minister for Agriculture in Northern Ireland as soon as possible after the Assembly is restored.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

44. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that although there was a commitment to put a ceiling on direct CAP payments of €150,000 and a commitment to lower that ceiling to €100,000, a small group of farmers were in receipt of payments of over €200,000 in 2016; and the way in which this happened in view of his commitment. [27959/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The €150,000 limit on basic payments is enshrined in Regulation 1307/2013, which establishes the current rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the CAP. The lowering of this limit would require a legislative change in Council, something that has not been envisaged as part of the Commission's ongoing simplification programme.

Since the 16th October 2015, the maximum amount payable to any one applicant under the Basic Payment Scheme (excluding the Greening Payment) is capped at €150,000 per annum. Ireland actively supported the concept of a maximum level during the CAP negotiations. Under the new Direct Payments Regulation, it was open to Member States to reduce payments over €150,000 by between 5% and 100%. Ireland opted for the highest possible reduction, thus effectively capping BPS payments at €150,000.

I am committed to further lowering the basic payment ceiling to €100,000, in line with the programme for Government, and I will be seeking to address this matter in the context of the future reform of the CAP. The Commission has yet to table proposals on the future CAP post-2020, and I will table the matter at the appropriate point as the discussions on the future policy evolve.

As regards payments in excess of €200,000, a small number of farmers (12), received total payments over this amount in 2016. The total payment comprises of the Basic Payment, capped at €150,000, and top up payments from Greening and if applicable the Young Farmer and Protein Aid Schemes. I can confirm that no farmer received payment in excess of €150,000 under the Basic Payment Scheme since this cap was introduced in 2015.

Veterinary Inspection Service Administration

45. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will guarantee the future of the regional veterinary laboratory in County Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28161/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) Laboratories are an integral part of the Department, providing critical scientific evidence and expertise (in animal health, food safety and plant sciences) which allows the Department to function effectively as a regulator, to deal with new and emerging risks and to rapidly respond to disease outbreaks and food safety incidents. The laboratories also provide valued services and advisory support to the farming community, the food industry and wider society.

The ambitious targets of the Agri-food industry for growth and development over the next decade, as set out in Food Wise 2025, must be underpinned by robust systems which protect and enhance our reputation as a producer of safe and wholesome food and one of the ways in which we must respond to this challenge is by developing a long-term strategy for the laboratories - building on existing capability and expertise in animal health, food safety and plant sciences, and ensuring we achieve both operational and scientific excellence.

This was the primary reason for tasking a Working Group led by Prof. Alan Reilly to un-

undertake a comprehensive review of the Department's Laboratories. This review has considered both the central laboratory complex at Backweston and the eight regional laboratories located at Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo. The Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes recommendations on:

- Oversight and co-ordination of the laboratories activities
- Re-organisation of Divisions and support functions within the Central Laboratory complex
- Options for the future development of the Regional Laboratories – with a view to improving disease investigative and surveillance capability but with the over-riding imperative of maintaining and enhancing services to farmers and
- Human resources management within the laboratories - with a focus on grading structures, career development opportunities and workforce planning

To date no decision has been taken in respect of the options proposed for the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs). My Department has recently completed an initial consultative process with all relevant stakeholders on the Working Group report (including on the options for RVLs). A cost-benefit analysis of the various options proposed will be undertaken shortly. Any decision I make on the RVLs, including Kilkenny, will be informed by the consultative process and the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis.

Fishing Licences

46. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to parliamentary question No. 435 of 28 March, 2017, when a decision will be made regarding fishing fleet capacity in view of the fact that the period of public consultation closed for submissions on 28 February 2017; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29123/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy may be aware, under the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003, the functions of sea-fishing boat licensing were transferred from the Minister to the Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats, which operates on an independent basis subject to criteria set out in that Act and Ministerial Policy Directives.

As Minister I have responsibility for policy in relation to sea-fishing boat licensing under Section 3(3) of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2003, as amended by Section 99 of the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006. In this context, and as referred to above, Section 3 of the Act makes provision for Ministerial Policy Directives to issue to the independent Licensing Authority for Sea-fishing Boats. I am, however, precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to individual cases, or a group of cases, with which the Licensing Authority is or may be concerned under Section 3(5) of the 2003 Act.

I received proposals from a Producer Organisation (PO) which, in summary, relate to the possibility of reducing the requirement to provide 100% replacement capacity with the relevant track record to 80% (the balance being sourced from capacity without track record). I undertook a public consultation process on these proposals and made a consultation paper available which set out the background to fleet policy and carried out an analysis of the current situation. The consultation paper examined the implications of the proposals made by the Producer Organisation and also put forward alternative options. As the Deputy notes, this consultation ended on

28 February 2017.

26 submissions were received in this regard and they are currently being examined. As the Deputy will appreciate, any change in licensing policy must be carefully considered and the potential impacts on the industry as a whole must be fully examined. I will carefully consider, following any further analysis needed, the case for amendment(s) to current licensing policy taking into account the submissions received. I will have my conclusions published on the Department's website, as early as possible.

Fish Quotas

47. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way he plans to distribute the extra mackerel quota which has been allocated. [29245/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am taking it that the Deputy is referring to the request I received from the Irish South and West Fish Producer Organisation to allocate the increase over 2016 of Ireland's mackerel quota for 2017 entirely to the Polyvalent Segment on a 1 year pilot basis in exchange for the recipient vessels forgoing demersal fishing in order to gauge the impact on the demersal vessels.

This matter has generated a lot of discussion in the industry and I have received many representations on the matter. Having carefully considered the matter, I decided that, without prejudice, there is a case for a review of the policy on allocations between the RSW Pelagic segment and the polyvalent segment of the fleet, taking account of request by the IS&WFO. In that regard, I decided that I am restricting consideration to the increased quota for Ireland in 2017 over that in 2016.

It is important to note that I have not made any decision at this time to change the allocations between the segments in respect of this part of the quota. All relevant issues will be carefully evaluated and subject to a full consultation with stakeholders before I decide if any amendment to the policy is justified for the proper and effective management of the mackerel fishery.

The public consultation process concluded on 28th February 2017 and 353 submissions were received. All submissions are currently being evaluated.

To support transparency in this process, all views received on the Consultation Document are now publicly available on my Department's website with the exception of a very small number of submissions where my Department acceded to the expressed wish of those who submitted them not to be made public for various reasons. Following the closure of the formal consultation process, any meeting that may be held with stakeholders will be open to all interested stakeholders that have engaged in the public consultation.

Horse Racing Ireland Funding

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the funding allocation to an organisation (details supplied) in view of the concerns regarding work practices in the industry it oversees including the fact that stable staff in the industry do not fall within the classification of agricultural workers despite being treated as such. [27962/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland is a commercial state body responsible for the overall administration, promotion and

development of the horse racing industry.

Horse Racing Ireland receives financial support from the State through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, under Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001. The level of financial support provided to Horse Racing Ireland is approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. In accordance with the 2001 Act, 80% and 20% of the monies paid into the Fund each year are distributed between Horse Racing Ireland and Bord na gCon respectively.

State funding provided from the Fund is pivotal to the survival and continued development of the horse and greyhound racing industries. The Irish bloodstock breeding and racing industry is of major national importance in terms of employment - especially in rural areas; exports and tourism. Approximately 14,000 people are employed in the thoroughbred industry in Ireland, mostly in rural areas and it attracts significant inward investment to the country.

The classification of workers is a matter ultimately for the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation but I understand that the general corpus of employment legislation including the Terms of Employment (Information) Acts, the Payment of Wages Act, the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act and the Unfair Dismissals Acts, applies to the horse racing industry.

I believe also that the Organisation of Working Time (General Exemptions) Regulations 1998 (SI No. 21 of 1988) exempt certain activities, including agricultural activities, from the application of minimum rest periods (Section 11, Section 12, Section 13 and Section 16 of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997) but horse racing activities are not specifically exempted under these Regulations.

Inspectors of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) have regard, on a case by case basis, to exemptions when determining compliance with employment rights entitlements. Where breaches of the relevant regulations occur, this may be taken up with the Workplace Relations Commission.

Where breaches of employment law by individual employers is alleged, such matters may be reported to the Workplace Relations Commission.

Greyhound Industry

49. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to protect greyhounds that are being exported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27968/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Trade within the EU of dogs, including greyhounds, is governed by EU law.

According to EU law, if dogs are exported to another EU country from Ireland, they must be accompanied by an EU pet passport, be microchipped, and have a valid rabies vaccination, which effectively ensures they are at least 15 weeks old at the date of export.

Also under EU law, the premises exporting dogs must be registered with my Department. Before travel, dogs must undergo a clinical examination by an authorised veterinarian, who must verify that the animals show no obvious signs of disease and are fit to be transported. Dogs must also have a health certificate issued by a Department veterinarian. These procedures ensure that only healthy dogs, over the age of 15 weeks, are allowed to be exported. Exporters must comply with EU law on the protection of animals during transport.

The Irish Greyhound Board (IGB) has stated that it does not support the export of greyhounds to destinations which do not conform with the standards in the Animal Health and Welfare Act, the Welfare of Greyhounds Act or the IGB Code of Practice and standards. I fully endorse this view.

Officials of my Department have met with the Irish Greyhound Board and with the welfare members of the International Greyhound Forum, which includes the Dogs Trust and the ISPCA, to consider issues surrounding the export of greyhounds. The Forum continues to take an active interest on the issue.

I am aware that the Deputy has introduced a Private Members Bill on the subject of the export of greyhounds. My Department's officials are currently examining this Bill.

Horse Racing Ireland

50. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to review and revise the thoroughbred foal levy regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27963/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

The current Foal Levy scheme, which was introduced in 2000 on a statutory basis, applies to all thoroughbred foals registered in Ireland. The Foal Levy is currently calculated with reference to SI 735 of 2011, which is the governing legislation.

HRI's Foal Levy Committee reviews the rates, bands and structures of the levy on an annual basis and has also considered potential alternative methodologies to calculate the levy due. They have concluded that the current banded/tiered approach represents the most equitable and appropriate way of securing the vital funds needed for the breeding sector. I understand that the majority of foals registered fall into the two lower bands of €35 and €50, and that there is a very high compliance rate of circa 98.3%

Direct Payment Scheme

51. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider reducing the current CAP ceiling from €150,000 to €60,000; and his views on whether the current system is unfair and inequitable in view of the fact that certain persons are in receipt of large six figure sums while younger persons struggle to get on to the scheme. [27965/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The cap of €150,000 on basic payments is set down in the Direct Payments Regulation, 1307/2013. This regulation establishes the current rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the CAP. The lowering of the limit below this amount would require a legislative change in Council, something that has not been envisaged by the Commission as part of their ongoing simplification programme.

Ireland had already imposed the lowest payment CAP permissible in the EU Regulations to limit payments to Irish farmers to a maximum of €150,000. Furthermore, the EU Regulation does not permit Member States to use the product of capping of Basic Payment Scheme pay-

ments for the purposes of replenishing or increasing payments to other farmers under the Pillar 1 schemes. Funding derived from capping is transferred to Pillar 2.

In respect of fairness and equity, under Pillar I, farmers who hold entitlements that have an Initial Unit Value that is below 90% of the Basic Payment Scheme national average see the value of their entitlements increase gradually over the five years of the scheme and by 2019, all entitlements for all farmers in Ireland will be at least 60% of the National Average value.

I am however committed to lowering the basic payment ceiling to €100,000, in line with the programme for Government. I will be seeking to address this matter in the context of the future reform of the CAP. Proposals from the Commission in this regard are not expected until early 2018 and I will be tabling the matter at the appropriate point as discussions on the future policy evolves.

Brexit Issues

52. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to safeguard the interests of the agrifood and fishing sectors ahead of the UK's move to leave the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28152/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I fully recognise the potential difficulties that may arise in the agri-food and fisheries sectors from the UK Brexit vote. These sectors are of critical importance to our economy given their regional spread and the fact that they underpin the socio-economic development of rural areas in particular. I am determined to safeguard the interests of these vital sectors.

While the main impact to date of the Brexit vote has been the effect of sterling volatility on 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. Ultimately the objective is to avoid these outcomes.

With a view to identifying common ground and building alliances for the negotiations ahead, I have held a series of bilateral meetings with EU counterparts. I also wish to ensure that agri-food and fisheries issues are at the top of the trade and economic agenda for the negotiation. My Department and I are also in regular contact with UK counterparts, both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I have also had meetings with major UK retailers to assure them of the continued commitment of Irish suppliers to the UK market.

In all of these engagements I am making clear Ireland's 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. In relation to fisheries, Ireland wants to maintain current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal, and to protect our quota share for joint fish stocks

In the meantime my Department and its agencies have conducted various analyses of the likely impact of Brexit on the agri-food sector. This is an ongoing process, and will continue, including 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.

Within my own Department, I have established a dedicated Brexit Co-ordination Unit and a Brexit Response Committee, to prepare for, monitor and respond to developments as required. These activities span almost all of my Department's administrative and control activities. As referred to earlier, I have also created a Stakeholder Consultative Committee, which is complemented by frequent contact with representative organisations and companies on an ongoing basis, and operates in parallel to the separate consultation structures under the All-Island Civic Dialogue.

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 the allocation of €2m additional funding to Bord Bia, in order to ensure that it is in a position to provide Brexit-related supports to affected companies, including through its new Brexit Barometer. I have also asked Bord Bia to conduct a market profiling exercise to provide a tool to assist exporters in identifying market priorities and to assist policy makers in prioritising market access objectives. I also provided for increased funding under the Rural Development Programme and Seafood Development Programme.

I wish to assure the House that the Government remains 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 for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures.

Direct Payment Scheme

53. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the objective of his Department in performing a new round of land eligibility inspections with stricter criteria which may result in hill farmers receiving reduced direct payments; the details of the new criteria; and the implications of each. [27958/17]

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 require 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.

In 2015 my Department published the "A Guide to Land Eligibility" booklet, which issued to all farmers, detailing all of the requirements that applicants must comply with to ensure that their land is and remains eligible for payment.

The land declared by an applicant under the various EU funded area-based schemes must be eligible agricultural land and must also have an agricultural activity carried out on the land.

The governing EU regulations set out a range of actions to define agricultural activity and maintaining it in a state suitable for grazing and cultivation. In Ireland we chose from the legal framework to go with a characteristics-based approach. Therefore an applicant is free to choose the method which best suits their farming operation to ensure that the land is suitable for grazing or cultivation. Furthermore we also exercised the option to deem what is known as "Permanent Grassland Established Local Practices" (PGELP) land eligible and hence the definition of

permanent pasture that is implemented in Ireland allows for the wide variety of grazing ground that exists in the State.

The main guiding principles for determining land as eligible include: The land is agricultural;

- The land is not abandoned;
- Ineligible features, e.g. buildings, areas of water bodies, scrub, rock, have been excluded from the area declared;
- There must be evidence that the applicant is maintaining the agricultural area.

With specific regard to Natura land, the “Guide to Land Eligibility” booklet details the provision set out in EU regulations where land that was eligible in the past and has now become ineligible, due to compliance with the requirements of the birds and habitats directives, can be considered for payment subject to specific criteria being met. However this provision can only apply where the farmer is still farming the land and the land is fundamentally an agricultural area.

There has been no change to the criteria being used to establish land eligibility since the publication of the 2015 Guide to Land Eligibility.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

54. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation when the report of the handling of the collapse of the recent trial by the ODCE (details supplied) is expected to be submitted to her Department; and if she will publish the report in its entirety as soon as it is received. [29267/17]

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.

Employment Rights

55. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a number of companies in the security industry are refusing to pay the recently passed ERO increase for the industry; the action her Department plans to take to ensure this increase is complied with; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29279/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Inspection and Enforcement Services of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) monitor employment conditions to ensure compliance with and, where necessary, the enforcement of employment rights legislation. This includes redress for the employees concerned and payment of any unpaid wages arising from breaches of employment rights.

The Industrial Relations Act 2012 provides for the making of Employment Regulation Orders (EROs) whereby proposals on pay and other terms and conditions are formulated by Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) and adopted by the Labour Court if the Court is satisfied that the JLC has complied with the relevant Sections of the 2012 Act. The Labour Court then makes a recommendation to the Minister who if satisfied that the Act has been complied with will make an Employment Regulation Order, the terms of which are legally enforceable and applicable to all employers in those sectors.

If enterprises that are covered by Employment Regulation Orders are experiencing severe financial difficulties they may apply to the Labour Court for an exemption from their obligation to pay the rates provided for in the Orders for a specified period of time. The criteria relating to these exemptions are provided for in the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2012.

Prior to the 1st June last, SI No. 417 of 2015 Employment Regulation Order (Security Industry Joint Labour Committee) 2015, which came into operation on 1 October 2015 applied in the sector. The table below sets out the detail relating to inspections carried out in the Security Sector between 1 October 2015 and 31 May 2017.

Security Sector	No. Inspections	No. of Employers in Breach
Oct-Dec 2015	3	2
2016	17	5
2017 (to 31 May)	5	2

Employment Regulation Order (Security Industry Joint Labour Committee) 2017 (SI No. 231 of 2017) came into effect from 1 June last and revokes the 2015 Order. It is anticipated that a similar number of inspections will be carried out in the sector this year as compared to last year.

Employees in the sector who feel that their employment rights have been contravened can make a complaint to the WRC. The Commission's Information Officers may also be contacted at 1890 808090 or through the website www.workplacerelations.ie for information on employment rights and entitlements.

Departmental Contracts Data

56. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external

agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29341/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): During the years 2015 and 2016 my Department, as an employer, did not engage external resources to undertake or support investigations in the area of human resources and industrial relations.

In addition, as the Public Appointments Service provides my Department with its externally sourced/recruited staff and my Department manages its own internal recruitment processes itself without recourse to external agencies or consultancy, no monetary costs arise, per se.

Action Plan for Jobs

57. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department will remain the lead Government Department for the action plan for jobs and the implementation of Enterprise 2025 under the new Government. [29397/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I will lead the development of the Action Plan for Jobs across Government and I will also lead the development and implementation of national enterprise policy, including Enterprise 2025.

The Action Plan for Jobs has proven to be an effective mechanism for coordinated cross government action focused on job creation and on creating an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship, investment and enterprise growth. The existing process will continue to ensure the required focus on the achievement of sustainable full employment on an annual basis in the context of considerable international uncertainty.

The ambition in Enterprise 2025 is to achieve sustainable full employment by 2020. The required actions to achieve sustainable full employment were set out in Enterprise 2025, in terms of building the resilience of the enterprise base through productivity, innovation and market diversification. These are to be delivered by DJEI and the enterprise development agencies and also by a number of government departments that have a role to play in ensuring we have a supportive and internationally differentiated business environment. I will be reviewing the performance and impacts achieved over the coming months and identifying any required changes and policy responses.

Unemployment Data

58. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the latest unemployment data in the CSO's Census 2016 Summary Results - Part 2 and the fact that there are 79 unemployment blackspots nationwide with Limerick city and county with 18 such blackspots; and if the action plan for jobs will be reviewed to take these findings into account. [29399/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government's goal is to create 200,000 jobs by 2020 – including 135,000 jobs outside Dublin. This is an ongoing process, and employment continues to grow strongly. In the year

since Census 2016 was completed, almost 70,000 more people are at work. More than three out of every four new jobs created in this period were outside Dublin.

According to the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey, in Q2 2016 when the Census was undertaken, there were 14,600 people unemployed in the Mid-West region. The unemployment rate was 8.5%. At Q1 2017, the most recent data available shows the unemployment rate in the Mid-West has dropped by 1.7 percentage points to 6.8%. The number of unemployed persons has fallen by 3,100 in the same period, while the number of people on the Live Register in County Limerick has fallen by almost 2,000 – a drop of 16%.

The Action Plan for Jobs is one of the Government's key instruments to support this target. My priority is to ensure that the actions committed to in the 2017 Plan to secure employment and retain jobs in the face of global uncertainty are delivered. I will shortly be commencing the process to develop the 2018 Plan. I want to use our collective resources across Government to support enterprise and sustainable employment growth in all regions and ensure all of our people have the opportunity to enjoy rewarding work.

Action Plan for Jobs 2017 includes actions aimed at stimulating regional growth, including the progression, monitoring and support of the eight Regional Action Plans for Jobs, which through public and private sector collaboration seek to build on existing strengths and assets and identify opportunities within each region, and realise the national Action Plan's regional employment targets.

To support the regional jobs agenda, additional funds will be made available through the enterprise development agencies out to 2020. In this context, a competitive Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2017-2020 was launched in May 2017, providing funding of up to €60 million to co-finance the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. This regional competitive fund will support the ambition, goals and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. In addition, additional funding of €150m is being made available to the IDA to support its Regional Property Programme and drive job creation in the multi-national sector.

Brexit Issues

59. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the policy proposals in the latest publication by an organisation (details supplied) regarding protecting businesses from a hard Brexit; and if the Government is considering implementing these suggestions including an agreement at EU level for revision of state aid rules. [29400/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I welcome the fact that many representative organisations have published papers identifying challenges for their sectors. This is important as it ensures that Government is better placed to put appropriate policy responses in place. This particular publication from Ibec is a valuable contribution to our knowledge base and will help to inform the development of policy responses.

A number of other useful studies have already been published which set out the potential impacts of Brexit, including sectoral assessments (e.g. tourism, agri-food), and many of these are listed on merrionstreet.ie website.

From my Department's perspective:

- We recently published the findings of a survey of 1,045 SME business owners and have set out a number of actions being developed to support SMEs in responding to the challenges of Brexit.

- My Department funded a recently published research project by the ESRI undertaken in close cooperation with 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.

- My Department is also currently undertaking research to examine the implications for the most exposed enterprise sectors - in terms of trading and economic relationships - of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union. This research will inform an assessment of the way in which Brexit will affect individual sectors of the economy.

- 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.

It remains important that Government consults widely and extensively as negotiations progress.

Since the Referendum, in my role as Tánaiste I have engaged with stakeholders, listening to their views about challenges and opportunities particularly in the context of Brexit. I am aware of the range and depth of issues facing Irish business in light of the decision of our largest trading partner to leave the European Union.

As Minister for Enterprise and Innovation, I look forward to engaging with a wide range of representative organisations to ensure that the potential impact of Brexit at a sectoral and regional level is understood and used to inform Ireland's policy response. In the coming weeks, I will be meeting representatives from across the business community to hear first-hand the issues facing enterprise in this country. The impact of Brexit will be a key focus of these discussions.

More immediately, I will be participating in the National Economic Dialogue in the coming days and will take the opportunity to discuss with all participants the challenges, mitigation measures and opportunities that Brexit raises.

This will build on the work my officials have already undertaken to ensure the Government's Brexit preparations take account of the issues facing businesses, entrepreneurs and innovators.

Earlier this year, my Department held a large stakeholder engagement event in Carrick-on-Shannon on 30th January to hear the views of all stakeholders. I look forward to co-hosting with Minister Bruton, a similar event which will focus on assessing and responding to the impact of Brexit on Skills on the 3rd July.

I am keen that the Department continues to engage in in-depth and frequent dialogue with our stakeholders on a range of policy areas which fall within our remit.

In this regard, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges is an effective tool for ensuring open, two-way communication between Government and the enterprise community, and provides a vehicle for discussion of enterprise, trade and investment policy implications arising from wider global challenges, with a specific focus on Brexit in the first instance.

In relation to supporting our enterprises, my department has been working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to build an understanding of the business needs of companies in adapting to the chal-

lenges posed by Brexit and to develop appropriate and targeted responses to support them.

Based on this work, we are progressing the development of a proposed Brexit Working Capital Guarantee Scheme and we are scoping out the need for a longer term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in investing for a post-Brexit environment. Development of these proposed responses is at an early stage, and is subject to resources being agreed as part of the annual budget process.

These measures are being considered in the context of existing State Aid rules leveraging support from EU sources such as the EIF.

As the situation evolves, and we get a better idea of impacts on enterprise in a post Brexit landscape, we will almost certainly need to have further discussions with the Commission in order to ensure that we take sufficient measures in good time to ensure that our most exposed and impacted companies and sectors do not suffer irreparable damage, resulting in significant job losses, as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

Credit Availability

60. Deputy Niall Collins asked the Minister for Finance his views on the increase in SME loan refusals by banks per the latest industry data (details supplied); and his further views on the lack of alternative sources of finance available to small businesses and the continued high cost of borrowing here compared to other European countries. [29398/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that my Department conducts a biannual SME Credit Demand Survey. This survey series, currently being conducted by Behaviour & Attitudes, is the most comprehensive survey of SME credit demand in Ireland, covering over 1,500 respondents and involving over 6,000 direct telephone calls to SMEs. SMEs of all sizes trading in all sectors, excluding property development and speculative activities, and in all regions are included.

The latest survey which can be found here <http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/sme-credit-lending> indicates that the majority of credit requests continue to be approved fully with 84% of credit applications (excluding 'still pending') approved or partially approved. The current rate of decline stands at 15% of all applications.

The Central Bank of Ireland's most recent SME Market Report for the second half of 2016 also shows that rejection rates for credit applications by SMEs and loan/overdraft rejection rates are in line with euro area averages. This report can be found here: <http://www.central-bank.ie/publications/Documents/SME%20Market%20Report%202016H2.pdf>.

In relation to borrowing costs, the most recent published Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, reports only 1% of the SMEs that did not seek credit stated this was because it was too expensive to borrow. When asked for the reason SMEs did not borrow, 86% of firms reported they did not need to borrow.

Notwithstanding these results the Government is conscious that the SME credit market is highly concentrated. In order to help address this issue, the Government established the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). Its purpose is to make sustainable, flexible and appropriately priced finance available to viable Irish SMEs and support investment in them that encourages growth and facilitates employment across the whole country.

The SBCI uses an on-lending model; this means it does not lend directly to SMEs, rather it

lends through partner financial institutions known as on-lenders. The SBCI currently has eight on-lending partners, three bank and five non-bank. The SBCI is seeking to broaden its distribution capability and market coverage by adding new on-lenders and working to develop innovative products, thereby serving to drive competition in the SME finance market.

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

Insurance Industry

61. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance further to parliamentary question No. 125 of 28 March 2017, the position regarding the Supreme Court ruling which was due on 25 May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29269/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Supreme Court delivered its judgment on 25 May 2017 and overturned the previous decisions of the High Court and the Court of Appeal that the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) is liable in respect of third party motor insurance claims made against the policyholders of Setanta Insurance. The consequence of this is that the Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) has been deemed responsible for the payment of such third party claims.

Setanta Insurance was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority in April 2014 and this liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law. The Liquidator has informed the Department that, as of 20 June 2017, the number of open claims was 1,578. As the judgment has been delivered, it is now possible to begin the process of making payments of up to 65% (or €825,000, whichever is the lesser) due to relevant third party claimants from the ICF.

It is expected that a proportion of the balance of claims will be met from the proceeds of the distribution of Setanta's assets on completion of the liquidation process. However, it is not possible to say definitively at this stage what proportion of the claims this will amount to, but current indications are that this is unlikely to be sufficient to cover all of the 35% gap.

In 2014, a preliminary assessment was carried out by Towers Watson who indicated that the Liquidator would not be in a position to meet more than 30% of claims out of the assets of the liquidation. The Liquidator has informed the Department that as the Supreme Court has now made its judgment, it will be necessary for a new report to be commissioned to provide updated figures. This is expected to commence shortly.

The extent of the shortfall (i.e. the difference between the full amount due and the combined total of the ICF payment plus the Setanta distribution) is unlikely to become fully clear until the liquidator has determined the remaining monies in Setanta that he has to distribute to policyholders.

Finally, in relation to when payments can be expected to commence, the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice and the State Claims Agency are working with the Liquidator to progress the making of payments. The Liquidator for Setanta has informed me that there are currently 324 claims ready for settlement and listed for inclusion in the next application for payment from the ICF, which will be subject to validation by the State Claims Agency. The State Claims Agency has assured the Department that it will act swiftly so that there will be no unnecessary delay caused by the validation process.

The Deputy may be aware that the forthcoming legislation based on the recommendations of the Review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation in Ireland will amend the relevant Insurance Acts to ensure 100% of third party motor claims will be covered in future.

Departmental Agencies

62. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the section 38 agencies which his Department has granted approval to use an asset as collateral under the terms of SI 120 of 2014 since the order came into operation; the specific asset used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29275/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): With specific regard to section 38 agencies, I am presuming the Deputy is referring to the agencies provided with funding under Section 38 of the Health Act, 2004. My Department has received no request for consent to be granted to a Section 38 body under the terms of SI 120 of 2014.

Statutory Instrument (SI) number 120 of 2014 refers to the General Government Secured Borrowings Order. The purpose of this Order is to prescribe the persons and bodies subject to the provisions of Section 67 of the Credit Institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010, which provides that secured borrowing by the prescribed persons and bodies requires the consent of the Minister for Finance.

The bodies listed in the schedule of the SI are prescribed for the purposes of Section 67 of the Credit Institutions (Stabilisation) Act 2010 (No. 36 of 2010).

This requirement in law is that a local authority or a person or body (including Government Departments) in the Schedule shall not mortgage, pledge or encumber its own assets or revenues to secure any present or future indebtedness or any guarantee or indemnity given in respect of such indebtedness without the consent of the Minister for Finance. This is required in order to comply with the loan agreements with the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM), the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) under the EU – IMF support programme, and with the UK, Sweden and Denmark under the Bilateral Loan agreements. The requirement remains in place for the duration of the loans, i.e. it did not expire at the end of the programme period.

NAMA Operations

63. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to initiate a section 227 review of NAMA, with regard to the achievement of NAMA's purposes under the NAMA Act 2009, in view of the recent commencement of the commission of investigation into NAMA and Project Eagle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29319/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I have a specific obligation to review and assess NAMA's activities under Section 227 of the NAMA Act. The establishment of a Commission of Investigation does not alter this obligation, nor my intention to carry out such a review in due course.

The Deputy will be aware that Department of Finance officials previously prepared a report under Section 227, addressing the period to year end 2013 which was published in July 2014. The report assessed the extent to which NAMA had made progress toward achieving its overall objectives and whether the continuation of NAMA was necessary for the purposes of the

Act. The report concluded that NAMA had made significant progress in achieving its overall objectives, and based on its performance and financial projections in light of the strength of investor interest in Ireland, was well positioned to achieve its overall objectives and so continued to be necessary.

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

The NAMA Act determines that a Section 227 Review is carried out as soon as may be after 31 December 2012, and every 5 years after that while NAMA continues in existence. Therefore, I expect the next Section 227 report to cover the period to year end 2018. This review will assess the extent to which NAMA has made progress toward achieving its overall objectives and determine whether NAMA remains necessary having regard to the purposes of the Act. Given NAMA's progress to date and expectations of continued progress toward achieving its overall objectives, I anticipate that this next Section 227 report will give consideration to various strategic alternatives regarding NAMA's orderly wind down once NAMA has completed its work.

As you are aware, Section 227 of the NAMA Act also allows the Minister to at any time require NAMA to report to him or her regarding progress with regard to the achievement of NAMA's purposes. I retain the ability to undertake such a report if I determine that a review of NAMA is required to cover a period before year end 2018.

Redundancy Payments

64. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding voluntary redundancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29320/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the NAMA retention and redundancy scheme was established to help safeguard NAMA's performance during an orderly wind-down and allow NAMA to fulfill its objective of maximising value for the State.

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with NAMA's redundancy and retention scheme, the Secretary General of the Department of Finance provided a detailed note on the scheme to the Public Accounts Committee in January 2016 which can be accessed via the following link (see pages 3 - 8): <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/pac/correspondence/2016meetings/meeting180-28012016/PAC-R-2078-Correspondence-3A.1---Follow-up-from-Derek-Moran-Dept-Fin-re-meeting-of-03.12.15.pdf>.

As set out in previous responses to the Dáil, including Dáil Questions 131 and 273 of 31 January 2017 and 2 May 2017 respectively, the redundancy element is in keeping with established public sector norms; that is, two weeks statutory pay per year of service, capped at €600 per week, plus three additional weeks of base salary per year of service with an overall cap of two years base salary.

NAMA has advised that the retention portion of the scheme is being implemented in line with the stipulated parameters, which my predecessor agreed with the NAMA Chairman in March 2015, regarding the quantum of any payment under the scheme, the timing of any such payment and employee eligibility under the scheme. To be eligible for the retention scheme a NAMA employee must:

- have been identified by the NAMA Board as essential to achieving NAMA's objectives;
- be on a specified purpose contract. An employee is not eligible if on a permanent contract; has a right of return to the NTMA or is employed by any successor entity of NAMA;
- have a minimum of two year's employment with NAMA at the time of redundancy
- have maintained a "fully satisfactory" rating or greater for the duration of their employment with NAMA; and
- remain with NAMA as long as required (Note: an employee will not be paid if (s)he resigns prior to the pre-agreed termination date).

Further to Parliamentary Question 273 of 2 May 2017, I am advised by NAMA that since the redundancy and retention scheme was approved by the NAMA Board in late 2015, a total of 91 members of staff assigned to NAMA have been approved for the scheme. Fifty of the 91 approved staff exited NAMA in 2016 at a cost of €3.6m; the accrued cost for the remaining 41 of 91 approved staff is €3.9m. To end May 2017, 6 of the 41 staff have exited under the scheme in 2017. The scheme is ongoing as employees continue to exit throughout 2017.

The following table provides a breakdown by division of the 91 members of staff approved for the scheme.

-	No.
Asset Recovery	53
Legal	17
Finance	12
Strategy/Communications	3
Asset Management	3
Residential Delivery	3
Total	91

National Treasury Management Agency

65. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the NTMA's records management policy with regard to the retention of e-mails; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29321/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Treasury Management Agency have informed me that its record management policy applies to all of its records irrespective of their format. The NTMA's records evidence the conduct of business and when considering retention periods, the content and context are the determining factors. Retention periods are set out in the policy, based on the nature of the records and any legal requirements. These vary from no longer than necessary to permanent. Therefore in relation to the retention of emails there is no set timeframe applying to emails, the retention period is determined by the content and context of the email.

Tax Code

66. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to facilitate the deduction of VAT at the point of sale for new vehicles for commercial customers with VAT regis-

tration (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29322/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the supply of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. In accordance with the VAT Directive the consideration paid for a supply of goods is chargeable to VAT at the time of supply. The supply of a new motor vehicle is liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23%. Under the VAT Directive there is no scope to facilitate the zero rating of this supply at the point of sale on the basis that the customer is registered for VAT.

As part of its risk based tax compliance programme, Revenue may identify significant or unusual VAT repayment claims and seek further information before processing the payment. Provided the taxpayer provides any requested explanations and documentation, repayments are normally processed very quickly. Revenue's customer service standard is that 80% of VAT repayment claims are finalised within 10 working days.

Departmental Contracts Data

67. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29338/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance reports a cost of €492.00 for all work contracted out to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues, for the year 2016. There is a nil value reported for 2015.

The following is a report of the monetary values for said work for offices under the aegis of my department. It was not possible for the Central Bank of Ireland, the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau, Financial Services Ombudsman Council and the Investor Compensation Company Limited to provide the information sought in the time available and therefore I will make arrangements to provide the outstanding information in line with Standing Orders. The NTMA will also provide the information with respect to the National Asset Management Agency and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland. **sues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016**

Body	The monetary value of all work contracted out or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016
C&AGs	Nil
Central Bank	Deferred until Friday 23/06/17
Credit Reviewer	Nil
Credit Union Advisory Committee	Nil

Body	The monetary value of all work contracted out or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	2015 - Nil 2016 - €19,000
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal	Nil
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	
Investor Compensation Company	
Irish Bank Resolution Corporation	Nil
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal	Nil
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	€10,245.90 to the ESRI for HR in 2016 €8,056.50 to the ESRI for HR in 2015
National Asset Management Agency	Advised NTMA will respond on their behalf
National Treasury Management Agency	Advised NTMA will respond on their behalf
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	2015 – 14,585.65 2016 – 3,177.55
Social Finance Foundation	Nil
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	Advised NTMA will respond on their behalf
Tax Appeals Commission	Nil

Banking Sector

68. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if provision has been made by a bank (details supplied) in its floatation on the market for persons who suffered a combined loss of approximately €0.5 billion in view of the fact that they were misled in making an investment in an investment portfolio; if he will request the bank to allow for this as an unpaid liability and that the attention of potential investors will be drawn to the liability that can occur here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29349/17]

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 Deputy, are currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

69. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the first-

time buyers grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29373/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume the Deputy is referring to the Help to Buy Incentive introduced in Budget 2017.

During the debates in the Oireachtas on the Finance Bill 2016, Minister Noonan agreed to commission an independent impact assessment on the effects of the Help to Buy tax incentive on the supply of new homes, house prices and the residential property market generally.

Following a competitive tender process, Indecon Economic Consultants were commissioned to undertake this assessment of the Help to Buy incentive. Work has commenced and the deadline for the submission of the consultant's report is the end of August 2017.

Once received, the contents and findings of the report will be considered by officials and presented to me. I will decide on appropriate action(s), if any, to take in relation to its findings, in the context of my deliberations for Budget 2018.

Financial Services Ombudsman

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints made to the Financial Services Ombudsman in each of the past four each years regarding payday loans; the number of same which were successful; the number of payday lenders that exist here; the value of payday loans in existence; the restrictions in place on the charges on payday loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29402/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, anyone wishing to engage in the business of moneylending requires a licence from the Central Bank in accordance with the Consumer Credit Act 1995 and this licence must be renewed every year.

Although a number of firms have approached the Central Bank in relation to offering payday loans in the Irish market, the Central Bank has a robust licencing process in place and no such business model has been licensed by the Central Bank. The Central Bank assesses every request for authorisation as a moneylender in accordance with the relevant legislation and best practice.

Payday lenders will not be able to passport their services into Ireland without seeking authorisation from the Central Bank. The Central Bank will continue to monitor the licensed moneylender sector closely and to take action where necessary to protect borrowers' interests.

Accordingly I have been advised by the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau (FSOB) that the information requested by the Deputy is not captured by product category. However, in January 2017 the FSOB expanded the categories of conduct complained of in its Case Management System and they regularly review and monitor for any new issues which should be added.

Financial Services Sector

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the complaints process for a customer availing of a personal contract plan to finance a purchase of a car; the number of complaints made in each of the past four years; the number of these complaints which were successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29403/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware it is not ap-

propriate for me to comment on or become involved in an individual borrower's dispute with a financial service provider.

On the issue more generally, if a customer has made a formal complaint to the financial service provider in question and is not satisfied with the outcome, then the matter should be referred to the Financial Services Ombudsman.

The Financial Services Ombudsman investigates, in an impartial and independent manner, complaints from individual customers and small businesses who have unresolved disputes with financial service providers which are either regulated by the Central Bank or, are subject to the terms of the Consumer Credit Act 1995. All personal customers, unincorporated bodies, charities, clubs, partnerships, trusts, and limited companies with a turnover of €3,000,000 or less can complain to the Ombudsman.

Investigations by the Financial Services Ombudsman are free of charge to the customer.

The Ombudsman has informed me that since January 2017 they began collecting data regarding Personal Contract Plans (PCPs) and to date no complaints have been received.

Central Bank of Ireland

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration has been made to adjust the mandate of the Central Bank to better enable it to attract financial industries and companies here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29404/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has a very wide and varied mandate as dictated by the statute of the European System of Central Banks, by the Supervisory EU Legal Acts and by the Central Bank Acts.

The Bank does not have a promotional mandate, as a key component of a successful and attractive jurisdiction for the location of financial services activities is a strong and independent regulator with international credibility.

We already have a significant infrastructure of promotional enterprises including IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland under the stewardship of my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise and Innovation.

For all of these reasons, I do not propose to adjust the Central Bank's mandate to enable it to attract financial industries and companies here.

Central Bank of Ireland

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the initial budgeted cost of moving the Central Bank to its new headquarters by relevant segments; his estimate of the cost; the amount spent to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29405/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that the total development cost of the new Central Bank building and moving staff to the Dockland Campus will be circa €140m (inclusive of VAT), in line with the budgeted figure. This figure includes all costs incurred on the project including site purchase, construction, furniture and fit out, IT, Security, Design Team, etc.

I am also informed by the Central Bank that while not all cost negotiations have concluded, as is standard in projects of this scale, the total cost of the project will be within the agreed budget. To date, the Bank has spent €127m on the project.

A detailed breakdown has been published on centralbank.ie and shows total payments made and amounts due for payment on the project as at end of March 2017. All spend is broken down on a supplier basis.

On the conclusion of all cost negotiations, a final detailed breakdown will be published confirming final spend.

Coastal Erosion

74. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps the OPW has taken to mitigate the effects of coastal erosion at Bettystown and Laytown beaches, County Meath; the levels of erosion experienced at these points on the coastline in the past ten years; the way in which the OPW plans to continue to measure the rate of erosion of the east Meath coastline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29295/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Coastal erosion is a natural and ongoing process, which takes place around the entire coastline. Coastal erosion may threaten human life, infrastructure such as roads and may undermine and cause damage to properties. However, it should also be recognised that coastal erosion also has beneficial effects to the local environment, such as providing natural nourishment and supply of sediment to adjacent beaches.

The primary objective of Government policy on coastal protection is to ensure that in areas identified as being at greatest risk of damage or loss to economic assets through coastal erosion or flooding, appropriate and sustainable measures are identified by Local Authorities to protect those assets and, where such measures are economically justified on cost benefit grounds and compatible with all required environmental and other statutory requirements, they are implemented subject to the availability of resources.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has undertaken a national assessment of coastal erosion (including erosion rates) under the Irish Coastal Protection Strategy Study (ICPSS) and the results of this study have been published on the OPW website. The relevant reports and associated predictive erosion hazard mapping (to 2050) may be viewed at <http://www.opw.ie/en/floodriskmanagement/floodanderosionmapping/icpss>

This Study has surveyed and assessed the coastal erosion risk along the entire national coastline and this information is available to all Local Authorities to enable them to develop appropriate plans and strategies for the sustainable management of the coastline in their counties including the identification, prioritisation and, subject to the availability of resources, the implementation of coastal protection works both of a structural and non-structural nature.

The Local Authorities may carry out coastal protection works using their own resources. If necessary, they may also put forward proposals to the relevant central Government Departments for funding of appropriate measures depending on the infrastructure or assets under threat.

Given an intervention within a coastal area may cause problems further along the coast, any proposed intervention measures are best developed in conjunction with a formal coastal erosion risk management study, which has carefully investigated the problem and explored the full range of management options.

The OPW operates the Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme, under which applications for funding from Local Authorities are considered for measures costing not more than €750,000 in each instance. Funding for coastal erosion risk management studies may also be applied for under this scheme. Funding of up to 90% of the cost is available for projects, which meet the eligibility criteria including a requirement that the proposed measures are cost beneficial.

The OPW has published guidelines for coastal erosion risk management measures and funding applications under the Minor Works Scheme, available on the OPW website and [http://www.opw.ie/en/media/FinalGuidelines&SchedulesB 2030-03-12.pdf](http://www.opw.ie/en/media/FinalGuidelines&SchedulesB%2030-03-12.pdf).

Following the severe storms of Winter 2013/2014 and on foot of submissions made by the Local Authority, total funding of €126,792 was provided by the OPW to Meath County Council under the Government decision S180/20/10/1272 of 11th February 2014 to allocate funding for the repair of damaged coastal protection infrastructure. Funding was approved for works at Laytown to include the replacement of gabions/rock armour revetment sea defence systems.

Departmental Contracts Data

75. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29343/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the following table outlines the information sought in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department:

Organisation	Monetary Value
Public Appointments Service	€157,823 *
Institute of Public Administration	€30,305 (to the end of 2016)
Office of Public Works	€3,918

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

Emergency Works Scheme

76. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if emergency funding will be provided to carry out repairs on a roof in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29285/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers recently submitted an application to my Department for funding under the Emergency Works Scheme to carry out roof repairs. As the scope of the works are outside the terms of the scheme, the application was refused. The school may use its minor works grant to carry out the repairs.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to parliamentary question No. 188 of 9 May 2017, if he has received assurances that at least one of the second level schools in Carrigaline, County Cork, will accept new first year students into their ASD programme for the 2017/18 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29293/17]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of such classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1152 at present. The NCSE has informed my Department that it intends to establish an additional 174 Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year which will bring the total number of Special Classes available across the country to 1326.

With regard to ASD Post Primary provision in the Carrigaline area, the NCSE has informed my Department that there will be 4 ASD Post Primary classes, including 1 newly established class, for the forthcoming school year.

The NCSE has confirmed that first year students have enrolled into these classes and that they are satisfied that there are sufficient placements to meet existing demand in Carrigaline.

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.

Scoileanna Gaeltachta

78. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cé mhéad scoil atá i dteideal a bheith aitheanta mar Scoil Ghaeltachta; agus cé mhéad scoil a chuir iarratas isteach ar an scéim aitheantais mar Scoil Ghaeltachta. [29307/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I mí Aibreáin 2017 thug mo Roinn cuireadh do gach bunscoil agus gach iarbhunscoil i limistéar pleanála teanga Ghaeltachta bheith rannpháirteach sa Scéim Aitheantais Scoileanna Gaeltachta. Fuair 133 bunscoileanna agus 28 iarbhunscoileanna an cuireadh sin agus beimid ag glacadh le foirmeacha um léiriú spéise ó scoileanna sna limistéir pleanála teanga Ghaeltachta a bhfuil fonn orthu bheith rannpháirteach sa Scéim go dtí deireadh na míosa seo. Faoi láthair, tá foirmeacha um léiriú spéise faighte ag an Roinn ó bheagnach 80% de na bunscoileanna agus níos mó ná 90% de na hiarbhunscoileanna sna limistéir pleanála teanga Ghaeltachta.

Departmental Bodies

79. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the appointment of a CEO to the City of Dublin Education Board in view of the controversy regarding the appointment of a person (details supplied) to the Court of Appeal; the steps he will take to ensure that all public appointments are made on the basis of open competition in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29317/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Chief Executive (CE) post in City of Dublin ETB was filled in March 2016 in accordance with the agreed redeployment arrangements for the ETB sector.

In 2013, through a series of decisions the then Government decided to reduce 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to 16 new entities, to be known as Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and to establish a new body to be known as SOLAS to replace FÁS. In order to address the redeployment of permanently appointed Chief Executive Officers of the former VECs, redeployment arrangements were agreed with SIPTU in the context of the Croke Park Agreement.

Under these agreed arrangements, permanent vacancies arising for CE of an Education and Training Board are subject to the application of these redeployment arrangements before open recruitment via the Public Appointments Service can be considered.

Departmental Contracts Data

80. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and

2016. [29336/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2015 and 2016 my Department did not engage an external agency or a consultant to carry out investigations in relation to human resources, industrial relations, disciplinary procedures, allegations of bullying or dignity at work issues.

In relation to the recruitment and selection of staff my Department engages the Public Appointments Service (PAS) which is an independent body established for such purposes under the terms of the Public Services Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004.

School Accommodation

81. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal for increased funding for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29370/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was allocated devolved funding under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2015 to build 2 standalone classrooms and a WC for assisted users.

The school submitted an application for significant additional funding for works outside the scope of the approved project. This was refused.

The school appealed this decision. The case has been reviewed and the school has been informed that my Department's decision not to grant the additional funding stands. In this regard, I am sure the Deputy will understand that due to the level of demand on my Department's capital budget, it is necessary, in the interest of fairness, to ensure that as many schools as possible can benefit from the funding available and that individual schools do not benefit to the detriment of others.

The school has been advised to arrange for and submit a design consistent with the works approved by my Department. The grant earmarked for the approved works remains available to the school.

Schools Building Projects Applications

82. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding applications for works submitted by schools (details supplied). [29384/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that building projects for the schools in question are included in my Department's 6 year Construction Programme.

My Department has identified suitable sites as permanent locations for the schools 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 both schools 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 projects through the architectural planning process.

Schools Building Projects Applications

83. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding applications for works submitted by schools (details supplied). [29385/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that building projects for the schools referred to in the details supplied are included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme. My Department will be in contact with both school authorities in the context of initiating the architectural planning process for the schools projects in due course.

Schools Building Projects Applications

84. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding applications for works submitted by a school (details supplied). [29386/17]

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.

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.

School Staff

85. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a school (details supplied) will retain its third teacher when school restarts in September 2017. [29387/17]

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.

School Accommodation

86. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will grant an application for additional accommodation at a school (details supplied). [29388/17]

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 for the project in due course.

In the meantime, my Department recently approved funding to the school to provide additional temporary accommodation pending the delivery of the building project.

School Accommodation

87. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will grant an application for additional accommodation at a school (details supplied). [29389/17]

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.

Schools Building Projects Applications

88. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for building works; when a decision will be made on the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29392/17]

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.

Schools Building Projects Status

89. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a proposed building project at a school (details supplied); when this project will proceed to construction stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29393/17]

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.

My Department is working towards finalising the acquisition of a site to provide the permanent location for this school and I can assure the Deputy that this acquisition is a priority for my Department.

School Accommodation

90. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive confirmation of its capital application for essential accommodation required for the 2017 to 2018 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29420/17]

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 additional accommodation.

My Department is currently considering the application and will be in contact with the school authority shortly on the matter.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a SUSI higher education grant will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29424/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

92. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka as a result of heavy rain which caused severe flooding and landslides in central, southern and western parts of the country; his plans to come to the assistance of these persons in this time of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29261/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the need to ensure that humanitarian assistance and support is provided as quickly as possible to the many thousands of people suffering as a result of the damage caused by severe flooding and landslides in Sri Lanka. Ireland has not directly provided any emergency funding to Sri Lanka at this time. However, 228,000 Swiss francs (€210,000 approx) was allocated from the International Federation of the Red Cross's Disaster Emergency Relief Fund (DREF) on 28 May to support the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society in delivering assistance and support to 40,000 people affected by floods and landslides. Ireland has been a consistent donor to the DREF in recent years and donated a total of €1.1m in funding to it in 2016. On 24 February, the Start Fund

provided €295,008 in funding to Handicap International, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision in response to drought in Sri Lanka. The Start Fund is an NGO-managed pooled fund which allocates small amounts of humanitarian funding to NGOs in the initial days of an emergency response and focusing on under-the-radar emergencies. It is currently funded by the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and ECHO. Ireland contributed €1 million to the Start Fund in 2016.

Ireland has also supported the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) since it was first established in 2005, and is among the top eight contributors. We have contributed just over €12 million to CERF in 2017. To date this year, CERF has disbursed over US\$7 million in funding to Sri Lanka.

We will continue to monitor the situation in Sri Lanka, including through our Embassy in New Delhi, which is accredited there. Our Ambassador in New Delhi maintains regular contact with the Sri Lankan authorities and regularly visits Sri Lanka for discussions.

Citizenship Applications

93. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of documentation including birth certificates for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29312/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The checking and adjudication of applications for citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration is a complex process, and it is important that the Department and our Embassies take all due care in relation to the verification of identity, eligibility and supporting documentation in each and every case. Consequently, we advise applicants that the process is likely to take around 20 weeks.

The applications for citizenship to which the Deputy refers were received at Embassy New Delhi on 13 February, 2017. I can advise that our Embassy in New Delhi has been in regular contact with the parents of the applicants concerned. I am pleased to confirm that the applications have now been processed and decisions will be communicated to the family by the Embassy in the coming days.

Departmental Contracts Data

94. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29339/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no bodies under the aegis of my Department.

EU Meetings

95. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at the recent Foreign Affairs Council; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29348/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I was representing the Government at the talks in Belfast on Monday 19 June so Ireland was represented at the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) by our Permanent Representative to the EU Mr. Declan Kelleher. Agenda items at the FAC included the EU Global Strategy, EU-NATO cooperation, counter-terrorism, the external aspects of migration and Iraq. Over a working lunch Ministers discussed recent developments in the Gulf region.

The Council took stock of progress in implementing the various strands of the EU Global Strategy ahead of a one year progress report by the High Representative to the European Council on 22-23 June. It is expected that discussion on the Global Strategy will continue at the FAC in the coming months, including identifying future priorities for implementation. The Council adopted conclusions on maritime security.

The FAC also took stock of progress on EU-NATO cooperation following the Joint EU-NATO declaration last year, and adopted Conclusions in this area. EU-NATO cooperation is essentially focussed on security. As the Conclusions re-affirmed, it is conducted with full respect for the decision-making autonomy of the two organisations and for the specific national security and defence policies of Member States.

The FAC also had a discussion on counter-terrorism, and adopted Conclusions which updated the Council Conclusions of February 2015 in light of new and emerging challenges in this area.

Ministers then had a discussion on the external aspects of migration, in light of the Partnership Framework on migration which aims to improve cooperation between the EU and third countries on addressing the crises.

Ireland was one of the Member States at the Council expressing deep concern at conditions of migrants in detention camps in Libya. Ireland also emphasised the importance of addressing the root causes and humanitarian aspects of the migration crisis.

Ministers also adopted conclusions on Iraq, which task the High Representative and the European Commission with presenting an EU strategy for engagement with the country in the period ahead.

EU Meetings

96. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the conditions and treatment of migrants in detention centres in Libya was raised at the recent Foreign Affairs Council; the outcome of such discussions; the proposals there are to deal with these matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29382/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The ongoing migration crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing the EU, and the Union has put in place a broad range of measures to address it. These have included the relocation of migrants from Italy and Greece across the EU; generous humanitarian assistance to countries hosting large numbers of migrants; and Operation Sophia, the naval operation to address the evil trade of people-trafficking in the Mediterranean. Those measures have had a positive impact, but more needs to be done. In the past year the migration focus has shifted from Turkey and Greece to the Central Mediterranean Route, from Libya to Italy. In March, EU Heads of State and Government set out the EU's commitment to assist Libya in their Malta Declaration. That commitment is broad-ranging including capacity building, training, and the provision of equipment and support for the Libyan national coast guard and other agencies. It also seeks to ensure that there are ad-

equate reception capacities in Libya for migrants, including through working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration.

In April of this year the EU approved a €90 million programme to step up protection of migrants and to reinforce migration management in Libya. A key objective is to provide multi-sectoral assistance and protection to migrants, refugees and host communities in different locations inside Libya, in particular inside detention centres, at disembarkation points and in urban settings. This programme is being implemented through a number of international agencies including the UN High Commission for Refugees and UNICEF. The €90m is in addition to the €120 million already announced by the EU for migration-related support for Libya. The EU will continue to closely monitor the migration situation in Libya to see what additional support is required.

Migration was discussed at Monday's Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and is also on the agenda for the European Council later this week. At the FAC, Ireland was among those expressing deep concern at conditions of migrants in detention camps in Libya. We emphasised – as we have on many previous occasions - the importance of addressing the root causes and humanitarian aspects of the migration crisis if an enduring solution is to be found.

It must be acknowledged too, that without an effective, internationally recognised government in Libya, addressing the migrant crisis in the Central Mediterranean region will continue to be very difficult.

Visa Applications

97. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average length of time to process visa applications; if he will provide a breakdown between the different types of visas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29283/17]

98. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications for visas with the INIS to date; if he will provide a breakdown of the different types of visas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29284/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 97 and 98 together.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the statistical information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table. The total number of applications include those received up to the end of May (being the latest figures available), while processing dates are current as of 21 June.

I am also advised that decisions regarding the grant or refusal of visas are made in a number of INIS Visa Offices overseas, the INIS Visa Office in Dublin, and at Embassies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which process certain visa applications under delegated sanction from my Department. The waiting times for visa decisions are published on the Visa pages of each Visa Office and Embassy website. However, it should be noted that target times for the processing of visas are established as a business target and do not constitute a legal obligation. These business targets reflect the detailed and often complex assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications.

As the Deputy will know, there has been an exponential increase since the second quarter of 2015 in the number of applications under the terms of the Free Movement Directive (2004/38/EC). This has given rise to a current caseload in the region of 9,000 applications overall which

have to be assessed very carefully to ensure that any fraudulent applications or potential abuses of the Directive are detected and dealt with appropriately. Legal proceedings in relation to a number of similar such applications are currently before the courts, and accordingly, the Deputy will appreciate that I am greatly limited in what I can say on the matter.

More generally, the processing time for visas in each location will vary based on a number of factors such as the number of applications, seasonal pressures, the complexity of the applications, whether further information or investigation is required, and the resources available. While every effort is made to process such applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary during the year and from one location to another.

The central concern, as with all visa services worldwide, in deciding on visa applications is to strike an appropriate balance between protecting the country's vital national interests by maintaining an effective immigration regime, while at the same time facilitating travel for those who meet the criteria. Each visa application is therefore decided on its own merits taking all factors into account.

Purpose of visa applications	Number of applications received 1 Jan - 31 May 2017.	Current Processing Date
Visit	24,920	19 May
Business	8,196	30 May
Conference/Event	4,292	30 May
Join Family (under national legislation)	3,227	30 January
Join Family (EU Free Movement)	1,323	See above
Study	3,542	15 May
Employment	1,791	30 May
Re-entry	19,700	12 June
Other*	4,052	30 May
Total	71,043	

* Includes training; exam; conference/event; performance//tournament and sundry applications.

Valuation Office

99. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will ensure that properties and holdings currently used by horse trainers continue to be categorised as agriculture status use to ensure that the Valuation Office does not apply a rate. [29379/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 provide for the valuation of all commercial and industrial property 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. I, as Minister for Justice and Equality, have no role in decisions in this regard. Under Irish law there is a distinct separation of function between valuation of rateable property and setting and collection of commercial rates. The amount of rates payable in any calendar year is a product of the valuation set by the Commissioner, multiplied by the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) decided annually by the elected members of each local authority. Specifically in relation to property used in the equine industry, I am advised by the Commissioner of Valuation that no re-classification of properties from rateable status to exempt status has occurred within the general equine industry since the Valuation Act 2001 came into force on 2 May 2002. The Valuation Act 2001 (Schedule 3, Sections 1(a) and (b)) provides that all buildings and lands used or developed

for any purpose, are rateable. The basic premise under the Act is that all interests (including buildings) and all developed land are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4 to the Valuation Act.

The only element of the equine industry which satisfies the exemption provisions in Schedule 4 is the breeding of horses. Buildings used for breeding of horses are classified as “farm buildings” as defined in the Act and therefore exempt from the payment of rates under paragraph 5 of Schedule 4. On the other hand, buildings used for the training of racehorses, recreational equestrian purposes or livery premises are rateable under the Act. Such buildings would typically include stables for horses, covered riding arenas, tack rooms and ancillary buildings used to support the enterprise.

While acknowledging the important contribution which all elements of the equine industry make to the economy, there are no plans to reclassify these as exempt from rates. To do so would be at variance with the provisions in the Valuation Acts which maintains the long-standing position that all property occupied and used for commercial enterprises are liable for rates. Exceptions to this key principle would quickly be followed by demands for similar treatment from the providers of other equally important services and products, which would be difficult in equity to resist. This could thus substantially reduce local authority revenues, which would have to be made good by imposing corresponding increases on the remaining ratepayers.

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 and is the express purpose of the National Revaluation Programme now being rolled out by the Valuation Office. The Valuation Acts provide for revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area so as to reflect changes in value due to economic factors such as business turnover, differential movements in property values or other external factors and changes in the local business environment. The national revaluation programme’s immediate objective 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, on a phased basis. This is a welcome and positive development which is long overdue and on which considerable progress has been made. Where the Valuation Office proposes to enter a new valuation or amend an existing valuation on a Valuation List, there is an extensive process available to cater for ratepayers who may be dissatisfied with the proposed valuation. A dissatisfied person can make representations to the Valuation Office within 40 days of the date of issue of the proposed valuation certificate. The Valuation Office will consider any such 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.

Naturalisation Applications

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29270/17]

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.

Prison Building Programme

101. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of tender competitions to a value of over €250,000 for construction of prisons and court buildings issued to construction companies in each of the past six years; the initial cost of each tender at contract award stage; the amount of the agreed final account or amount paid in each case; the reason for overruns; the detail of each; the specific procurement method in each tender or contract award case; and if former State employees were engaged on construction projects. [29291/17]

102. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of tender competitions for building construction services that were issued over each of the past six years (details supplied); the cost of each tender initially at award stage; the amount of the agreed final account or amount paid in each case; the reason and details for overruns; the specific procurement method utilised in each case; if former State employees were engaged; and the terms and conditions of engagement in each case. [29292/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

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.

Garda Reform

103. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the most recent controversies within An Garda Síochána, if he has complete confidence that the Garda Commissioner is capable of implementing the changes and reform needed within An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29300/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have full confidence in the Garda Commissioner as she proceeds with the implementation of the most ambitious programme of reform ever embarked on by An Garda Síochána.

Last July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan

for An Garda Síochána which combines the Government's response to the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government aimed at increasing the visibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of An Garda Síochána. The Government agreed that the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme (MRP) 2016-2021 would be the vehicle for implementation of the Inspectorate recommendations aimed at the Garda organisation. In support of this plan, Budget 2017 provided funding to continue to expand the number of Gardaí towards 15,000, to double the Reserve to 2,000 and to double the number of civilians to 4,000 by 2021. In addition, the plan is supported by substantial capital investment of some €310 million in critical ICT infrastructure, the fleet and other Garda facilities.

Robust independent oversight is essential to ensuring that the pursuit of the reform programme is relentless over the next 5 years. To ensure that this is the case, the 240 agreed recommendations of 'Changing Policing in Ireland' have been referred to the Policing Authority to monitor and assess their implementation by An Garda Síochána and to report progress to me on a quarterly basis. The first two progress reports from the Authority, received in January and April, have been published on my Department's website.

Priority areas include further civilianisation. This is crucial - we need to ensure that Gardaí are engaged in the work that they are trained for - policing - and not carrying out administrative and technical roles that can be done by civilian professionals. The Government has set a medium term target of 20% civilians to be achieved by 2021 to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí to front line policing duties, and also to address critical capacity and skills gaps in An Garda Síochána in relation to HR, finance, ICT and corporate supports generally.

Other priority areas include initiatives aimed at the more effective deployment of resources, more effective supervision of front-line personnel and cultural change including:

- the roll-out of the Divisional model of policing to support the more flexible and effective deployment of resources - four pilots are in train and will be evaluated later this year;

- the roll-out of Divisional Protected Services Bureaus on a phased basis starting in three Divisions;

- the commencement of the performance appraisal framework in the third quarter with training underway at present;

- the cultural audit to provide a baseline against which cultural change in An Garda Síochána can be measured in the future will get underway shortly - An Garda Síochána has selected a company to carry out this work after a tender process. The results of the audit will be published.

I believe the only way to deliver world class policing in Ireland is to ensure that An Garda Síochána has the resources it needs and that those resources operate in an organisation whose culture is open and responsive and where the best management systems and practices are deployed. I am confident that the reform plan that is being pursued by the Commissioner, supported by the Government and overseen by the Policing Authority, has the capacity to achieve this. It will not be done overnight and it will not be done easily, but with the necessary support and oversight, it can be achieved over the next four years.

Garda Reserve

104. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the strength of the Garda Reserve; and the estimated full year cost of increasing it to 2,500. [29326/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that as of 12 May 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 644 Reserve Gardaí. 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. 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.

As the Deputy will be aware service in the Garda Reserve is voluntary and unpaid. However, an allowance is payable to Reserve members who complete a minimum of 208 hours duty annually as a contribution towards expenses incurred in performing their duties. The allowance is currently set at €1,000 per annum. In addition, the uniform cost per Reserve member is in the region of €1,300. As such, should all recruits complete the minimum of 208 hours duty annually, the full year cost of increasing the strength of the Garda Reserve to 2,500 is approximately €4.3m. The costs associated with the training of the reserve members is considered part of the Garda trainers' normal duty and is therefore not identifiable.

Garda Strength

105. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated full year cost of increasing enlisted membership of An Garda Síochána to 15,000. [29327/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of personnel and resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I understand from the Garda authorities that the year one cost of increasing Garda numbers to 15,000 is €34.3M, assuming a commencement date of 1st January. The annual payroll costs for these extra members would increase to €59.4m in year two as all members would be fully attested at that stage and paid at the appropriate Garda salary rate. Year one costs for new Garda recruits include a basic weekly allowance of €184. After 32 weeks of training, Garda recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale €28,405, rising to a maximum of €50,448 per annum after 19 years. They may also qualify for other allowances depending on their assignments.

For the purposes of this calculation, the costs are based on basic salary plus employer PRSI but do not include any allowances that the members may be entitled to after being attested.

The cost of recruitment and training recruits are subsumed into the overall training costs of the Garda College and are not easily identifiable.

Garda Civilian Staff

106. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated full year cost of providing an extra 2,000 civilian staff in An Garda Síochána. [29328/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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. Funding for the recruitment of up to 500 civilians has been provided for this year to support the wider reform agenda.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the full year cost of recruiting an additional 2000 civilian staff to An Garda Síochána is approximately €86M. I understand that this figure has been calculated based on an estimated cost per person of €43,000. The precise costs would of course depend on the profile of the personnel to be recruited in terms of their qualifications and level of responsibility within the organisation.

Departmental Contracts Data

107. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29342/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The total monetary value of work contracted out to external agencies and consultants from my Department and agencies under my aegis for 2015 and 2016 is as follows:

Services provided	2015	2016
Workplace Investigations	€71,807	€80,839
Recruitment Services	€44,796	€127,236
Legal Services	€47,965	€42,011
Mediation/facilitation	€14,620	€10,124
Total	€179,188	€260,210

The Deputy may wish to note that the previous PQ 23959/17 outlined figures in respect of 2016 and 2017 and that due to an oversight figures from two bodies were not included in the response provided. The table outlines relevant expenditure in each of the years 2015 and 2016

from my Department and agencies under my aegis.

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

Garda Information and Communications Technology

108. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the inadequate staffing levels at the Garda Information Services Centre; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact it has been the subject of discussions between his Department and the Commissioner. [29378/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) is a contact centre for operational members of An Garda Síochána. After an incident, Gardaí contact GISC on mobile phones instead of returning to their station to record the case details. They give the details to trained civilian call-takers who enter the details on the PULSE system. GISC was established on a pilot basis in September 2005 and rolled out nationally by October 2006. The objectives of GISC are to increase Garda visibility, reduce Garda administrative workload and improve the data quality on PULSE. GISC is located in Michael Davitt House, Castlebar, and operates on a 24/7 basis. In addition to taking calls from Gardaí, GISC personnel also take Traffic Watch calls from the public and administer the on-line reporting of theft in order to enable its investigation by Gardaí.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that as of 30 April 2017, the most recent date for which figures are available, the total staffing of GISC was 187.2 full-time equivalents. The office is fully civilianised.

The Deputy will be aware that 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. 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.

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. 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, of which 34 relate to GISC including 3 Assistant Principal Officers, 2 Higher Executive Officers, 12 Executive Officers and 17 Clerical Officers. The recruitment of these sanctioned posts is in train.

The Assistant Principal roles were sought to fill vacancies in operationally critical roles. The remaining posts were sought in order to expand the capacity of the unit in order to roll out the

recording and classification of all PULSE incidents centrally at GISC. This requirement arose from a recommendation in the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' in order to improve the consistency and quality of data collected, which contributes to the accuracy of crime statistics. This methodology has been piloted successfully at GISC. The implementation of this process across all areas of the country is an essential element to contribute to the improvement in the quality of the crime statistics. Clerical Officers working in GISC perform the call taking function, they work a 24/7/365 roster.

Prisoner Transfers

109. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the prisoner transfer scheme following the Supreme Court judgement in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29390/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy is referring to the judgment by a majority decision of the Supreme Court on 12 July, 2016 in the case known as 'O'Farrell, McDonald, Rafferty -v- The Governor of Portlaoise Prison'. The case concerns an appeal taken by the State against a judgement of the High Court ordering the release of the three named prisoners who had been transferred to Ireland from the UK, where they had been sentenced, under the provisions of the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners Acts, 1995 -1997. The judgement is detailed and complex and has implications for the continuance in its present form of the process operated by the Irish Prison Service for transferring prisoners from other States to Ireland, and vice versa. The practical effect of this judgement and whether it will necessitate legislative and/or administrative changes is being examined by officials of the Irish Prison Service and my Department in consultation with Attorney General. Pending legal clarity on these issues, applications by prisoners abroad for transfer to Ireland cannot be processed to a conclusion at present. I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that all applicants and officials in the appropriate sentencing states are being informed of this position.

Family Law Cases

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a family law court may include a condition in a court order to the effect that a person may not leave the jurisdiction with the children concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29416/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Under section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964, the guardian of a child may apply to the court for an order giving directions on any question affecting the welfare of the child, including the custody of, and access to, the child and the payment of maintenance. Either parent of a child, whether or not he or she is also a guardian of the child, may apply to court for a direction regarding custody of, or access to, the child.

In relation to the guardianship, custody or upbringing of, or access to, a child, section 3 of the 1964 Act provides that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration for the court in these proceedings. The best interests of a child are to be determined in accordance with Part V of the 1964 Act, inserted by section 63 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. Section 31 of the 1964 Act sets out a wide range of factors that the court is required to take into account when determining the best interests of the child. These factors include the benefit to the child of having a meaningful relationship with each of his or her parents. Section 25 of the 1964 Act also requires the court, as it thinks appropriate and practicable,

to take into account the child's wishes in custody and access matters, having regard to the age and understanding of the child.

Section 12A of the 1964 Act (inserted by section 58 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015) provides that in making any order under the Act, the court may impose such conditions as it considers to be necessary in the best interests of the child. The court may, where it considers it necessary and appropriate in order to protect the best interests of the child, including his or her right to the care and custody of both of his or her parents, impose conditions in relation to the holding of the passport of a child.

It is a matter for the courts when making orders in relation to matters such as the guardianship, custody or upbringing of, or access to, a child to consider whether or not any conditions should be attached to such orders. I have no role in the making of court orders, as this is a function of the courts, which are, subject to the Constitution and the law, independent in the performance of their functions.

Direct Provision System

111. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to serious allegations at a direct provision reception centre (details supplied); and if he will ensure that these allegations are thoroughly investigated immediately. [29423/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Any allegations of this nature are of serious concern and need to be investigated thoroughly. The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of my Department referred the matter to An Garda Síochána for immediate attention, immediately on becoming aware of these allegations.

Residency Permits

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency entitlement or eligibility for medium to long-term residency in the case of a person (details supplied). [29425/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in May 2017, the person concerned applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child. The Deputy will appreciate that applications are dealt with in chronological order. My officials in INIS will contact the person concerned if further information or documentation is required.

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

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consid-

eration will be given to offering long-term residency with conditions in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29426/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer to my response to Parliamentary Question Number 43 of 26 January 2017.

As previously advised, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department informs me that it appears that both persons concerned never had permission to remain in the State and they should be aware that it is illegal for them, under the Immigration Act 2004, to remain in the State without permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable, under section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

In addition, it is apparent that the persons concerned have failed to meet the requirements of Section 9 of the Immigration Act 2004, which sets out the obligations of non-nationals in respect of registration. Both persons concerned appear to be illegal in the State, therefore they should be advised to present themselves at their local Immigration Office within 28 days.

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

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to the application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied). [29427/17]

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 has been recommended 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.

Residency Permits

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to parliamentary question No. 101 of 9 of May 2017, the procedure to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied). [29429/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 101 of 9 May 2017.

I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it has not received any correspondence or an application for an immigration permission from the person concerned. The person mentioned by the Deputy should be advised to present themselves to their local Immigration Office as soon as possible.

From the limited information provided, it appears that the person concerned may never have had permission to remain in the State, and they should be aware that under Section 5 of the Immigration Act 2004 it is unlawful for a non-national to be in the State other than in accordance with the terms of any permission given by the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person who contravenes such a requirement may have committed an offence and if found guilty is liable, under section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

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 for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in questions where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration will be given to the issue of stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29430/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 100 of 9 May 2017.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department have advised that the person mentioned by the Deputy registered as a student in the State on 10 March 2014 and also that their permission expired on 2 March 2015. INIS inform me that, to date, no further application has been received from the person concerned.

It appears that this person has been unlawfully in the State since March 2015. A non-national may not be in the State other than with the terms of any permission given to the person concerned by the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person who contravenes this requirement may have committed an offence and if found guilty is liable, under section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both. As this person does not have current immigration permission they are not entitled to work in the State.

As the person concerned appears to be illegal in the State, it is incumbent on them to present themselves at their local Immigration Office within 28 days.

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 for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Question process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in questions where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if stamp 4 will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29431/17]

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 referred to is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 11th March 2005 and therefore has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned pursuant to Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), to revoke the Deportation Order. The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS 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

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise residency in the case of a person (details supplied); if this case can be urgently considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29435/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in November 2011, the person concerned applied for Long Term Residency in the State. Long Term Residency is granted on the basis that a non-EEA national has completed five years legal residency in the State on work permit / work authorisation / working visa conditions. Residency is calculated from the corresponding Stamp 1 or Stamp 4 endorsements in an applicant's passport and not by the dates of commencement and expiry of each work permit. Periods of time where a person has not had legal residency cannot be counted in any application for long term residency.

My officials in INIS were in contact with the person concerned on 22 October 2012, seeking further information. To date this information has not been received by INIS and the application has been deemed abandoned.

As the person concerned has not held permission to reside in the State since 23 June 2012, it would therefore seem that they have remained in the State without the permission of the Min-

ister for Justice and Equality. This is in breach of Section 5(1) of the Immigration Act 2004 which provides that no non-national may be in the State other than in accordance with the terms of any permission given to them by or on behalf of the Minister. Furthermore, Section 5(2) of the Act provides that a non-national who is in the State in contravention of subsection (1) is for all purposes unlawfully present in the State.

It would appear that the person referred to by the Deputy failed to meet the requirements of Section 9 of the Act of 2004 which sets out the obligations of non-nationals in respect of registration and, in particular, I would draw the Deputy's attention to the requirements of Section 9(2)(b) of the Act of 2004. A person who is found to be in breach of the requirements of the Immigration Act 2004 may have committed an offence. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable under section 13 of the Act of 2004 to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both.

It is open to the person concerned to write to the Residence Unit 2 in INIS seeking a temporary permission (Stamp 1) in order for them to apply for a employment permit under the Reactivation Employment Permit scheme. Please see www.inis.gov.ie for details. The Employment Permits (Amendment) Act 2014 introduced on a statutory footing a new Employment Permit type, the "Reactivation Employment Permit", which will address this situation i.e where non-EEA nationals who entered the labour market legally on foot of an employment permit have now fallen out of the Employment Permits regime.

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.

Residency Permits

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider offering temporary or medium-term residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29436/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned are a husband and wife who are the subject of Deportation Orders made on 11th March 2005.

Both persons were deported from the State on 4th June 2006, however, according to information received from their legal representatives, they returned to this State the year after they were deported.

Representations were received on behalf of the persons concerned requesting that the Deportation Orders be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Orders. In the meantime, the Deportation Orders remain valid and in place.

The Deputy may wish to note that queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the

Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when stamp 4 will be renewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29439/17]

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 was granted leave to remain in the State for the period to 21 December, 2015. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 21 December, 2012.

The person concerned is required to apply in writing for the renewal of this permission. As my Department's records show no evidence of such a renewal application having been made to date, it is recommended that the person concerned should do so without further delay.

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

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination of entitlement to short medium-term residency eligibility to apply for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29443/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): If the person whose details were supplied has made an application for asylum or subsidiary protection in the State, the Deputy will be aware that it is not the practice to comment on such applications until they have fully completed the protection process. This is in accordance with Section 26 of the International Protection Act, 2015.

Both the staff of the International Protection Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) and the Members of the International Protection Appeals Tribunal are independent in the performance of their protection functions.

A Customer Service Centre established by the International Protection Office may be contacted by individuals with any queries - info@ipo.gov.ie. Similarly, the International Protection Appeals Tribunal operate an email which can be contacted by individuals with any queries regarding their application - info@protectionappeals.ie.

Family Reunification Applications

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if family

reunification will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29445/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for family reunification from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

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.

Departmental Contracts Data

123. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29332/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that no Human Resource or Industrial Relations work as described by the Deputy was contracted out by my Department to external agencies or consultancies during 2015 and 2016.

Action Plan for Rural Development

124. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the monetary committee meeting held on 29 March 2017 will reconvene; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29415/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am assuming the Deputy is referring to Monitoring Committee for the Action Plan for Rural Development which met on the 23rd March 2017. The next meeting of this Committee is scheduled to take place on 20th July 2017.

Western Development Commission Funding

125. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to provide funding to the Western Development Commission in 2017 for investment in business and industrial projects under the western investment fund or other instrument the Western Development Commission has to assist business in the west in view of the growing underspend in her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29450/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather

Humphreys): The Western Investment Fund (WIF) is an integral element of the Western Development Commission's (WDC) strategy for accelerating the economic and social development of the Western Region. The Fund provides risk capital, by the way of loans and equity (but not grant aid, which is prohibited under the Act) on a commercial basis to micro-enterprises, SMEs and social enterprises.

All investments from the WIF are repayable and all monies recouped are re-invested in enterprises in the region. The WDC works closely with its clients, supporting them on a long-term basis and helping them to achieve their growth targets.

The original Government Decision sanctioning Exchequer funding to the WIF set the upper limit for Exchequer investment at £25 million (€31.7 million). Funding was drawn down on an ongoing basis as required by the WDC.

There has been no additional allocation of Exchequer funding provided to the Fund in recent years, as the limit of €31.7 million was reached in 2010.

To date, the WDC has invested over €45 million in enterprises in the region. My understanding is that there is sufficient return on existing investments from the WIF to address any current and future investment needs.

Departmental Correspondence

126. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding indigenous medicine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29262/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The World Health Assembly agreed a Resolution on Strengthening integrated, people-centred health services, which inter alia urges WHO Member States

“to integrate where appropriate traditional and complementary medicine and modern health systems, based on national context and knowledge-based policies, while assuring the safety, quality and effectiveness of health services and taking into account a holistic approach to health ”.

The Resolution recalled the earlier *World Health Assembly Resolution 67.18 (2014) on Traditional Medicine* which requested the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO):

- to continue to provide policy guidance to Member States on how to integrate traditional and complementary medicine services within their national and/or subnational health care system(s), as well as the technical guidance that would ensure the safety, quality and effectiveness of such traditional and complementary medicine services with emphasis on quality assurance;

- to continue to promote international cooperation and collaboration in the area of traditional and complementary medicine in order to share evidence-based information, taking into account the traditions and customs of indigenous peoples and communities.

My Department is keen that the WHO would act to support Member States particularly in relation to technical guidance and the sharing of evidence-based information on traditional and complementary medicine as, in their absence, evidence-based decisions cannot be taken. In this light, it is not my intention to integrate complementary and traditional medicine in the Irish

healthcare services.

Hospital Appointments Status

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an admission date for surgery for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [29264/17]

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

128. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE can be directed to cease the practice of forcing its employees who are certified sick on a long-term basis being forced to go through the hardship of having to obtain fresh sick certificates on a monthly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29268/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

129. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) County Kerry will be provided with a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29271/17]

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

130. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment to meet a consultant at UHW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29273/17]

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

131. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding physiotherapy for a person (details supplied). [29276/17]

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 Charges

132. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has received a bill from Sligo University Hospital; the hospital charges and the amounts owing concerning this bill; if the hospital has made a decision in respect of this appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29277/17]

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.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

133. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the basis on which the HSE national contact point for the cross-border directive EU2011/24 places a limit for reimbursement for outpatient diagnostic procedures at the level of €130 (details supplied). [29296/17]

134. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the legislative basis on which

the HSE national contact point for the cross-border directive EU2011/24 places a limit for reimbursement for outpatient diagnostic procedures of €130 (details supplied). [29297/17]

136. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the HSE to establish a similar ready reckoner for all outpatient diagnostic procedures provided by the HSE for persons wishing to avail of treatment under the terms of the cross-border directive EU 2011/24 in view of the fact that the HSE NCP for the cross-border directive EU 2011/24 operates a ready reckoner for medical consultants to establish the HSE cost for procedures carried out under the terms of the cross-border directive. [29299/17]

172. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the details of the operation of the cross-border directive; the number of persons that availed of this scheme in the past year and to date in 2017, by the location in which the treatment was carried out; and the type of treatment and costs involved, in tabular form. [29422/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133, 134, 136 and 172 together.

The Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursement of patients' of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State (Member State of Affiliation) and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level through the legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (Regulation 883/04). The Directive seeks to ensure a clear and transparent framework for the provision of cross-border healthcare within the EU, for those occasions where the care patients seek is provided in another Member State rather than in their home country. S.I. 203 of 2014 provides the legal basis for the Health Service Executive to operate the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland, including the reimbursement of the cost of treatment.. Under the provisions of the S.I. the HSE is charged with determining the cost of providing such healthcare in the State for the purposes of deciding on the correct reimbursement rate.

Under the Directive, insured patients are entitled to have costs of cross-border healthcare service reimbursed if the healthcare service in question is among the benefits to which they are entitled in their Member State of affiliation. The HSE is pro-active in advising potential users of the Scheme that reimbursement will be at the cost of the treatment availed of abroad or the cost of providing the healthcare in Ireland whichever is the lesser. The patient is notified of this by the HSE in numerous ways: via the HSE website or in response to phone queries; on the Pro-forma invoice to be used for cases where an overnight in-patient stay is not required; and the letters issued in response to prior authorisation applications for cases involving an overnight in-patient stay will advise the actual amount to be reimbursed, based on the treatment code/s provided by the treating/referring consultant in the application form. The HSE also advises where a patient is in any doubt as to the need to seek prior authorization before availing of a consultation or treatment abroad to contact the National Contact Point. The NCP is able at that stage to advise patients of the indicative reimbursement rate that will apply to the assessment/treatment being accessed.

As some of the issues raised, namely the rates set for, and the issue of a ready reckoner for, out patient diagnostic procedures are come and the numbers who have received treatment, are under the remit of the HSE, I have asked the HSE to examine these matters and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

HSE Expenditure

135. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if all diagnostic procedures carried out by the HSE or that are commissioned by the HSE from private providers are priced at no more than €130 for accounting purposes. [29298/17]

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. 136 answered with Question No. 133.

Hospital Waiting Lists

137. **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. [29301/17]

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

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

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

Home Help Service Provision

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding home help hours; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29304/17]

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 Screening Programmes

139. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the support provided to the cardiac screening programme (details supplied) provided at the Mater Misericordiae university hospital; the details of funding provided for the provision of the service for each of the years 2014 to 2016; if such a programme is offered at public facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29313/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have again asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

140. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment from Galway University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29314/17]

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

141. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment at Letterkenny University Hospital, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29315/17]

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

142. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29316/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

vice 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 again asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

143. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will have an assessment of needs carried out under the Disability Act 2005. [29330/17]

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.

Departmental Contracts Data

144. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29340/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department did not contract out any work or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations in 2015 or 2016.

I asked the HSE to respond to you directly on the aspect of the question that relates to their employees. In relation to the 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 Appointments Status

145. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29347/17]

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

146. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year running costs of opening all medical assessment units on a seven day basis. [29350/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medical Assessment Units (MAUs), Minor Injuries Clinics and similar units provide valuable services to local communities and alleviate the pressures on EDs. MAUs facilitate the immediate medical assessment, diagnosis and treatment of medical patients who suffer from a wide range of medical conditions who present to, or from within, a hospital requiring urgent or emergency care.

The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the contribution of MAUs, Urgent Care Clinics and Minor Injury Clinics, and commits to a review of such clinics, acknowledging that some of these facilities have limited hours of operation.

The Department is committed to undertaking the Review, as outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government, with a view to extending their hours of opening and weekend opening. In considering the opening hours of MAUs, the Review will have particular regard to the distance from the nearest ED and existing workloads. Work on this Review is progressing in 2017.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

147. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an extra 500 hospital consultants; and the average estimated cost for support staff required per consultant. [29351/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

148. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 4,000 nursing staff. [29352/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Prescriptions Charges

149. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of abolishing prescription charges. [29353/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Services

150. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of increasing the general practitioners rural practice allowance to €25,000. [29354/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Regulations were signed on 5 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 the new 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 1 June 2017, there are 251 practice units in receipt of rural supports under the RPSF. 176 practices receive the financial allowance of €20,000 and 19 practices receive the modified allowance of €10,000. The full year cost of increasing the existing allowance to €25,000 and the corresponding modified allowance to €12,500 for these practices would amount to almost €928,000. Any increase in the financial allowance under the new RPSF would only apply to those practices that qualify under the new criteria, therefore these calculations have excluded the 56 GPs who currently receive the old financial allowance of €16,216.07.

National Maternity Strategy

151. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of implementing the national maternity strategy. [29355/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ireland's first National Maternity Strategy - *Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026* - will be implemented on a phased basis led by the National Women & Infants Health Programme. The Programme is currently drawing up a detailed action plan to inform this process; this work is expected to be completed by the end of this month and includes the identification of both capital and revenue funding requirements, which will in turn inform the annual Estimates process over the lifetime of the Strategy.

€3 million development funding provided for maternity services in 2016 was allocated in line with the Strategy, and included funding for additional staff, including 100 midwives, the

development of specialist bereavement teams and for the implementation of the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management System. Increased funding of €6.8m has been provided for maternity services in 2017 which will allow for the continued implementation of the Strategy.

Home Help Service Expenditure

152. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 2.2 million home help hours. [29356/17]

153. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 5,000 home care packages. [29357/17]

163. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 200 intensive home care packages for persons with dementia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29367/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 152, 153 and 163 together.

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

Mental Health Services Staff

154. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of completing the recruitment required for the full implementation of a vision for change. [29358/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Drugs Payment Scheme Expenditure

155. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost of reducing the drug payment threshold from €144 to €100. [29359/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Speech and Language Therapy

156. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 speech and language therapists. [29360/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Occupational Therapy

157. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 occupational therapists. [29361/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

HSE Staff Recruitment

158. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 200 physiotherapists. [29362/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Dental Services Staff

159. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 50 dental surgeons. [29363/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Ambulance Service Provision

160. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated capital cost of providing an additional emergency ambulances fleet; and the estimated full year costs of additional personnel required for its staffing. [29364/17]

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

Ambulance Service Provision

161. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated capital cost of providing an additional emergency ambulance; and estimated the full year costs of additional personnel required for its staffing. [29365/17]

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

162. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional one and a half million personal assistant hours for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29366/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 2017, the HSE expects to deliver 1.4 million Personal Assistance hours to 2,357 adults with a physical and/or sensory disability.

As the Deputy's query relates to a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for a more detailed direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 152.

General Practitioner Services Provision

164. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing free general practitioner care to all the population. [29368/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The cost of GP visit and medical cards varies significantly with the age of the cardholder. The following table outlines the current indicative annual cost for GP visit card eligibility and medical card eligibility, by age group.

-	Indicative Annual Cost per Card	-
Age Group	GP Visit Card	Medical Card
0 – 4 Yrs	€243	€392
5 – 15 Yrs	€163	€214
16 - 44 Yrs	€149	€595
45 – 64 Yrs	€221	€1,217
65 – 69 Yrs	€250	€1,602
Aged 70 and over	€500	€2,092

Note: Data is compiled by the HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service, based on available information for the 6 month period to February 2017 and by extrapolation to full year costs.

The extension of free GP care to all citizens not currently covered by medical or GP visit card would encompass a further 2.6 million people approximately.

The Deputy will be aware of the ongoing review of the GMS and other publicly funded contracts involving GPs, and that the next phase of discussions to progress this work is underway. The estimated cost of extending free GP care to all citizens, or specific cohorts of the population, will vary depending on the outcome of these negotiations and any implications they may have for the future scope and content of the general practitioner service, and the relevant fees and payments to GPs. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time.

Hospital Beds Data

165. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of providing an additional 100 critical care beds. [29369/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

166. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an operation at Crumlin hospital. [29391/17]

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

167. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the actions he will take to ensure timely access to MRIs in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin for persons with scoliosis in view of the fact that 18 month to two year waits are putting children at huge risk of injury, deformity and lifelong health complications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29410/17]

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 Waiting Lists

168. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to safeguard children with scoliosis waiting for halo traction treatment in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; the way in which he will ensure that no child will be left deteriorate on a wait list for halo traction; the actions which will be taken to ensure all children awaiting halo traction in the hospital will have immediate access to care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29411/17]

170. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans the four month target is to be met by year end; if he will commit to his pledge that no child will have to wait longer than four months for scoliosis surgery by year end 2017 once a clinical decision is made by the treating consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29414/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 170 together.

In order to reduce the long waiting times for scoliosis surgery for children and young people, I asked the HSE to develop an Action Plan for 2017. The HSE Scoliosis Waiting List Update and Service Development Plan has been finalised and details of it are available on the HSE

website. The Plan aims to ensure that no patient who requires spinal fusion or other scoliosis procedures, including halo traction, will be waiting more than four months for surgery by the end of the year, where that is appropriate clinically. The HSE has advised the Department that every patient, including children under the age of 14, who needs to be treated in 2017, has been considered and is included in the overall plan for scoliosis services.

The Plan includes measures to increase capacity in the children's hospitals as well as proposals to outsource some spinal procedures to other hospitals nationally and internationally. The Children's Hospital Group is monitoring progress made and is reporting to the Department on a weekly basis.

While the Plan endeavours to deliver on short to medium term reduction in the waiting lists, in tandem the HSE is working to develop a long-term sustainable solution for scoliosis and paediatric orthopaedic cases. The numbers of patients on each of the waiting list categories is being taken into account in planning the future service requirements.

Hospital Services

169. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of children with scoliosis that are transferred to Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, Temple Street CUH and Cappagh for diagnostics, pre-ops and surgery having had first contact with the orthopaedic team privately; his views on whether there should be a fair and equitable access to public services and care for all children regardless of their ability to pay; the actions he will take to ensure all children can access timely outpatient assessments in the public system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29412/17]

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.

Question No. 170 answered with Question No. 168.

National Maternity Hospital

171. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his views regarding ownership of the new national maternity hospital; his plans to ensure that it is retained in public ownership; and the timeframe to make a final decision on this matter. [29421/17]

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.

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.

Question No. 172 answered with Question No. 133.

Hospital Appointments Status

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the status of an eye operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29432/17]

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 Applications

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29437/17]

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

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29438/17]

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.

Orthodontic Services Provision

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if orthodontic treatment will be made available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29440/17]

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.

Dental Services Provision

177. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the scheduled date for the dentist visit to a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29449/17]

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.

Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme Applications

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a grant application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29259/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant has submitted a claim under the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II. There is an issue with ineligible receipts submitted with the claim for payment. The case will be processed within the next number of days and finalised with a view to issuing payment as soon as possible.

Coillte Teoranta

179. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29272/17]

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, are the responsibility of the company.

This matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that Coillte facilitates grazing on its lands, in certain circumstances, under a licence as opposed to a lease, and that, in general, licences run for an 11 month period and are revocable at any time by the licensor.

The granting of such licences is an operational matter for the company and, as such, it would be inappropriate for me to intervene.

Departmental Contracts Data

180. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29331/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The monetary value of all work contracted out by my Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues was €100,150.75 in 2015 and €64,975.58 in 2016*.

* while contracted out in 2016, some of the monies were actually paid in 2017.

Greyhound Industry

181. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the agreed terms between the Irish Greyhound Board and all other sectors of the greyhound industry in resolving having the protest picket at Shelbourne greyhound park removed. [29372/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established in 1958 under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and improve and develop the greyhound industry.

Bord na gCon has informed me that, following mediation and a ballot of its members, the Dublin Greyhound Owners & Breeders Association on Thursday 15th June 2017, decided to support the resumption of live racing at Shelbourne Park Stadium. Racing is to re-commence from Tuesday 20th June and will see an increase in Live racing at Shelbourne Park and extra supports for the local greyhound community.

The question raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Bord na gCon but I understand that among the proposals agreed is that a dedicated racing manager will be provided in Shelbourne Park for Harold’s Cross racing, there will be dedicated Harold’s Cross race nights in Shelbourne Park and all staff from Harold’s Cross will be accommodated at Shelbourne Park Greyhound Stadium.

In addition, Bord na gCon has committed to hosting a National Greyhound Consultative Forum within the next 30 days to seek feedback and engagement as to how the industry can move forward.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

182. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount and the number of persons refused under the agriculture cashflow support loan scheme as administered by the SBCI in categories (details supplied). [29383/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Last month I welcomed the release of preliminary information from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) regarding the uptake of the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme. The Scheme, which was developed by my Department in co-operation with SBCI, makes €150 mil-

lion available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital, allowing them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

The SBCI reported that €60.2m had been drawn down by farmers to the end of April. The average loan size is €32,000, with more than half the loans being advanced for terms of four years or more. By sector, 42% of loan value has been to dairy enterprises, 41% to beef and 8% to tillage, with other sectors such as sheep, pigs and horticulture also applying. The banks advise that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down.

Normal bank lending criteria applies to the Scheme and the terms and conditions of each individual loan are agreed between the bank and the applicant according to the purpose of the loans and the circumstances of the farming enterprise. The banks do not report specific information on refusals but have stated that it is in line with their normal loan refusal rates. Applicants to the Scheme have a right of review with the Credit Review Office, which provides an independent review process for SMEs, sole traders and farm enterprises that have had requests for credit refused or had existing credit facilities reduced or withdrawn.

One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance. I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

183. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether a tillage compensation package for 2016 harvest should be agreed by his Department and that all contributing factors be considered such as the costs associated with replanting of said same crops. [29394/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I hosted a Tillage Stakeholders Forum on the 16 February, following on from the first one in October 2016, which on both occasions consisted of representatives from all sides of this Sector. Addressing the most recent Forum, I took the opportunity to highlight that one of my priorities has been to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some sectors, which have caused cash flow difficulties for farmers.

Therefore I was pleased to facilitate the “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” and last month I welcomed the release of preliminary information from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) regarding its uptake. The Scheme, which was developed by my Department in co-operation with SBCI, makes €150 million available to farmers at interest rates of 2.95%. Distributed and administered through AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank, the Scheme provides farmers with a low cost, flexible source of working capital and allows them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises. The SBCI reported that €60.2m has been drawn down by farmers to the end of April. The average loan size is €32,000, with more than half the loans being advanced for terms of four years or more. SBCI report that some 8% of the loans to date have been drawn down by the tillage sector which is in line with borrowing levels for the sec-

tor as a proportion of total agricultural borrowings. The banks advise that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance. I have met with the Chief Executives of the participating banks to discuss this and other access to finance issues relating to the agri-food sector. I have asked the banks to respond positively to the demand that has been demonstrated by reducing interest rates and providing more flexible terms for cash flow loans in the future. Implementation of this Scheme is subject to the provisions of Commission Regulation (EU) No 1408/2013 (de minimis aid in the agricultural production sector). Support provided under the de minimis regulation complies with State Aid rules in the agriculture sector and does not require prior approval by the EU Commission.

Under this regulation, I introduced the Tillage Investment Scheme under TAMS II which opened for online applications on the 8 March 2017. The specific areas of investment include Minimum Disturbance Tillage Equipment, Sprayers, Rain Water Harvesting, Grain Storage and Grain dryers. This Tillage Scheme is the latest of the Targeted Modernisation Schemes (TAMS II) to be launched under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The Scheme is co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

All applications must be made on-line, either by the farmer or by an adviser authorised to act on his or her behalf. The closing date for applications under the first tranche of the new scheme is Friday 30 June 2017. A further Tranche will open immediately on the 1 July with a closing date of the 6 October 2017.

As an additional support to cash flow on farms, including Tillage farms, up to **€1.186billion** has been paid out under the Basic Payment Scheme to 124,112 farmers with payments ongoing. Payments of **€202.34million** have also been made to 94,552 applicants under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme.

I can also confirm that a wide ranging discussion took place among all the stakeholders who attended the Tillage Forum, including on the issue of crop losses as a result of the poor harvest conditions of last autumn. My officials have since then had some additional meetings with stakeholders and I will consider further the outcome of those deliberations.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

184. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recent adoption of the European Parliament of revised climate change targets that reduce the contribution of carbon sequestering via planting of trees and carbon storage in soils in meeting emission targets; his further views on proposals by MEPs to set 2020 as the starting point as opposed to 2005 for 2030 targets; if he raised these issues at the recent Council of Agriculture Ministers meetings with his EU colleagues; and if not, the reason therefor. [29406/17]

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 potential 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.

With specific regard to the proposals made by the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament, a range of actions are being and have been taken in respect of appropriate briefings with MEPs and on a bilateral basis with our fellow Member States on those elements of most importance to the agri-food sector.

I can assure you of my commitment and that of my officials to ensuring these negotiations result in the best possible outcome for Ireland. We will continue to work closely with the lead Department in this area, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, to ensure a whole of government approach to the negotiations.

Appointments to State Boards

185. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the appointments made to State boards under his auspices in the period 1 May 2017 to 16 June 2017, by appointee name, position and relevant State board; the appointment process for each such appointment; and the State boards under his auspices in which vacancies remain unfilled. [29407/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have not made any appointments during the period in question to the boards of the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department.

There are currently nine vacancies on the boards of the six State Bodies listed below. These vacancies are being processed in accordance with the Public Appointments Service Guidelines.

- Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board (1 vacancy)

- Bord Bia (1 vacancy)
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara (3 vacancies)
- Marine Institute (1 vacancy)
- Bord na gCon (1 vacancy)
- Coillte (2 vacancies)

Departmental Communications

186. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a revised ministerial briefing will be published and downloadable on his Department's website. [29408/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's updated brief will be available on my Department's Website <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/> early next week.

European Innovation Partnerships

187. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to parliamentary question No. 568 of 23 May 2017, the persons or bodies that made submissions prior to the launch and formation of the locally led scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29446/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Locally Led approach is a measure which was proposed as part of the Irish Rural Development Programme for the period 2014-2020.

As part of the preparation of the RDP, my Department conducted an extensive and wide-ranging consultation process, which included open invitations to make submissions on any aspect of the design and direction of the new Programme. A full description of that process, including a summary of the main points to emerge, can be found in the published version of Ireland's Rural Development Programme. Ideas pertinent to the Locally Led model feature in many of the submissions received and all of these have been uploaded to my Department's website. In addition, my Department also held an open public seminar in Portlaoise in October 2015 focusing specifically on the proposed new locally-led measure. There was a very wide representation of interested parties present at that seminar and feedback from the floor, and from workshops on the day, also influenced the design of the new scheme.

Broadband Service Provision

188. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to avail of the European Commission's programme under the WiFi4EU scheme to promote free Wi-Fi connectivity for EU citizens and visitors in public spaces and in particular for County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29260/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 €20 million 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 be announced in due course by the European Commission. It is known, however, 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 include local authorities, with any local authority eligible to apply as long as their application fulfils the conditions set by the European Commission.

Broadband Service Provision

189. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the rollout of at least 30mb broadband speeds to a location (details supplied) in County Donegal as part of the national broadband plan; if such areas with poor or no broadband coverage shall be prioritised during the rollout phase as part of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29278/17]

192. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the date for the rollout of high speed broadband for Elm Grove, Sallybrook, Glanmire, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29409/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 and 192 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. As a result, the NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that 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 and today, approximately 1.4m or 61% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. This footprint is continuing to expand.

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.dcae.gov.ie.

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout will be published on the Departments website. The Q1 figures have been verified by my Department and I am pleased to announce that the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement. My Department has informed me that in the period from 1 January to end March 2017 over 30,000 premises have been passed. This brings to over 40,000 the total subset of the 300k premises that eir has passed since they commenced work in late 2016.

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 by eir on commercial grounds. Neither I nor the Department have a statutory authority to direct eir in this regard.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map finalises the State Intervention Area for the procurement process and is an important milestone in the procurement process. 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 following table details 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	% Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	% Premises within Commercial Operator's Area
CORK	Elmgrove, Sallybrook	Riverstown	9%	91%
DONEGAL	Meenacharvy	Mín an Chearrbhaigh	100%	

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 pro-

cess. The remaining 1.8m premises are located in the BLUE areas and will be/are served by commercial operators. Of the 1.8m premises, 1.4m are already within a high speed broadband area and a further 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/>.

My Departments High Speed Broadband map www.broadband.gov.ie. 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.

In relation to the State Intervention; this is intended to ensure high speed broadband is made available to premises and businesses in the areas where commercial investment has not materialised. My Department is running a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. 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 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 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.

With the finalisation of the map and following extensive dialogue with bidders, the procurement is progressing to the next stage. This week, the Department wrote to the three bidders in the NBP procurement process inviting them to submit their "Detailed Solutions" by 26 September 2017. This is a significant milestone as the NBP procurement process moves to the next stage.

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 rate of demand for data services has increased exponentially in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for telecommunication 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. I published the first such quarterly progress report on 13th June 2017, which is available on my Department's website at <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Taskforce%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.

Departmental Contracts Data

190. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29334/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I can confirm that my Department did not contract out any work relating to human resources investigations or industrial relations issues during the years in question.

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.

North-South Interconnector

191. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will give urgent consideration to a request from a local authority (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29381/17]

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 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. Apart from these external factors, the terms of reference is in keeping with all other factors contained in the motions passed.

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. 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.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 189.

Bus Services

193. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a bus stop; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29265/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for securing or providing public transport infrastructure in the State in relation to bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations, bus stands and bus fleets.

Noting this, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

194. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application for sports capital funding by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29280/17]

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 Funding

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding funding for a group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29290/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Presently, the Department provides a small number of annual grants (22 in all) to certain designated land and maritime entities that are known as ‘declared resources’ which can immediately be tasked by an appropriate state agency in a search and rescue incident.

Where maritime declared resources are concerned, the Department provides an annual grant of €5,000 to 12 community boat rescue organisations. CRBIs are categorised as ‘Declared Resources’ to the Coast Guard in that they form part of resources immediately available to respond and assist in Maritime Search and Rescue at the Coast Guard’s request. The grants are not EU funded and are funded solely from this Department’s exchequer vote.

The Coast Guard has no plans to take in any additional resources at this time.

Tourism Funding

196. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding options available for feasibility studies for potential tourism projects with specific reference to the agritourism sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29324/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department’s role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland to develop tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of those capital programmes. Similarly, the Department does not have discretionary funds at its disposal to assist with individual tourism proposals. Fáilte Ireland provides a range of practical supports to help businesses and communities better manage and market their products and services. Fáilte also provides supports for investment in tourism attractions as well as advice on the supports available from other agencies.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy’s question to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten

working days.

Railway Stations

197. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on Irish Rail's strategy to make train stations staffless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29325/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is presumably aware that staffing at train stations is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and not one in which I have any statutory function. I understand that the Company is keeping staffing under review as there have been changes in customers' purchasing preferences. Overall, only 17% of revenue is now via the traditional booking office, and booking office volumes dropped by as much as 55% in a single year in some locations, as overall passenger numbers rose.

Iarnród Éireann's priorities in determining staffing levels are:

- To ensure busier stations are manned at all times.
- To provide a more flexible resourcing to respond to customer demand, and improve response for customers requiring assistance.
- To ensure a safe and secure environment, working with live monitored CCTV system, contracted private security resources and Garda liaison.
- To ensure revenue is protected, working with the Company's Revenue Protection Unit.

As previously noted, the issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Departmental Investigations

198. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29345/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The cost of investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations matters in my Department was €22,386 in 2015 and nil costs in 2016. 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 advise my private office.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

199. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding an application for 1:1 support under the access inclusion model in respect of a person

(details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29263/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), 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. It was introduced in June 2016 and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. AIM supports children with disabilities to attend mainstream pre-school where they can learn and socialise with their peers. It includes 7 levels of progressive support, moving from the universal to the targeted. The degree of support provided depends on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school setting they are attending.

A pre-school provider, in partnership with a parent, can apply for AIM Level 7 - additional capitation. Where the AIM Early Years Specialist considers that a Level 7 support is critical to a child's participation in the pre-school setting, they will further consider the degree of Level 7 support required having regard to whether the child has complex or highly complex needs. Where a child is deemed to have complex needs, payment of Level 7 capitation at the lower rate will enable the setting to supplement their staffing by 10 additional staff hours per week. Where a child is deemed to have highly complex needs, payment of Level 7 capitation at the higher rate will enable the setting to supplement their staffing by 15 additional staff hours per week. This can be used to reduce the adult to child ratio in the pre-school room or can be used to buy in additional assistance.

In relation to this particular child, Pobal has advised that an application was received on 23rd May 2017 for support under AIM Level 7. The Early Years Specialist (EYS) conducted an observation visit on 14th June and met with the pre-school provider and the child's parents. The EYS is currently finalising the relevant information on the application and it will then be sent to the AIM Pobal team for appraisal. The decision will be formally communicated to the pre-school provider and the child's parents as soon as possible.

Family Resource Centres

200. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the process in place if a group wishes to establish a family resource centre in a town; and when can an expression of interest be placed for same. [29282/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers the Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme. As the FRC Programme is managed by Tusla, it is a matter for that organisation to make decisions regarding the inclusion or non-inclusion of Family Resource Centres to the programme.

Tusla has advised that when an expression of interest is received from a group to establish a Family Resource Centre, a meeting with the group in question is arranged. There is significant demand from many established Family Resource Centres, as well as new groups that wish to join the Programme. Tusla has advised that all applications to join the Programme are kept on file.

I would like to acknowledge the valuable work of Family Resource Centres (FRCs), and I very much value the positive impact of their work in supporting families and local communities.

Departmental Contracts Data

201. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29333/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): With regard to my Department, I can confirm that the costs for work contracted out to external agencies and/or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations was €1,732.50 in 2015 and €8,766 in 2016.

With regard to four agencies under the aegis of my Department, I can confirm that the costs for work contracted out relating to these matters are as follows:

- Oberstown Children Detention Campus: €24,767.26 in 2015 and €32,075.57 in 2016.
- The Adoption Authority of Ireland: no costs in 2015 and €27,060 in 2016.

As the Office of the Ombudsman for Children is independent in its function and reports to the Oireachtas on matters within its remit, as required by the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, I have forwarded the question to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and asked that they reply directly to you. I also have forwarded the question to Tusla and asked that they reply directly in this matter also.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

202. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo in view of the fact that they have been waiting 16 weeks for a decision. [29258/17]

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 the 23rd February 2017. The application will be examined by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Applications are processed in date of receipt order. Due to the large volume of applications currently being received, it can currently take 18 weeks to process an application for DCA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Bereavement Grant

203. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Social Protection if consideration will be given to the restoration of both full or partial bereavement grant (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29266/17]

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.

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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

204. **Deputy Michael D'Arcy** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an appeal for a domiciliary care application will be processed and decided upon for a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29274/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that the appeal from the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer who has decided to convene an oral hearing in this case.

Every effort will be made to hear the case as quickly as possible and the appellant will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

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.

Pensions Legislation

205. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she has carried out a financial analysis as to the impact to companies operating defined benefits pension schemes arising from her plans as outlined in head 12 and 13 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2017; if so, if she will publish same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29281/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The possible implications, both positive and negative, of the proposed measures have been subject to considerable deliberation by my Department. It is not feasible to carry out a financial analysis given the variability of

schemes, employers and market conditions. All defined benefit (DB) schemes are different, with their own trust deeds and scheme rules, setting out contribution rates for employers and employees. The circumstances of each scheme may change over time depending on investment strategies and market conditions and it is not possible to estimate the number of schemes that will not satisfy the funding standard in the future and by how much. In addition it is not possible to ascertain the likelihood of sponsoring employers changing their support for their schemes as this is likely to be driven by a combination of financial issues, investment decisions and industrial relations matters.

Notice periods for the termination of employer contributions are normally set out in trust deeds and rules vary from scheme to scheme. Head 12 of the Social Welfare and Pensions Bill obliges employers sponsoring DB schemes to give 12 months' notice of their intention to cease contributions, irrespective of those scheme rules.

It should be emphasised that these provision do not result in an increase in the rate of contributions payable by an employer but merely stipulates that the employer contributions must continue for a period of 12 months from the date of notice.

Where an employer proposes to cease making contributions to a DB scheme an alternative pension arrangement is usually put in place, such as a DC scheme. Any alternative pension arrangements will also result in employer costs. Accordingly, any contributions arising in respect of the 12 month notice period, in excess of the notice period already set out in the scheme rules, must take account of the costs of any alternative pension arrangements that would have been put in place.

The serving of notice to cease contributions is, in the ordinary course, a precursor to winding up the scheme. Given that any such action will have a fundamental impact on the members' benefits the purpose of the introduction of a notice period is to give employees and trustees sufficient notification of this event.

Head 13 of the Bill enables the Pensions Authority to determine a funding obligation that will restore DB pension schemes, which do not satisfy the funding standard or funding standard reserve, to an adequate funding position, in circumstances where a funding proposal has not been agreed.

The funding standard defines the basis on which the liabilities of DB schemes must be calculated. The funding standard provides a benchmark against which the 'health' of a scheme can be tested. Where a scheme fails the funding standard it means that unless some action is taken the scheme will not be in position to pay the benefits promised. A funding proposal, which must be approved by the Pensions Authority, should be designed to ensure that the scheme will have sufficient assets to meet its liabilities within an acceptable period.

It should be noted that Head 13 does not fundamentally change the current voluntary system underpinning DB schemes to a mandatory one where the obligation to fund all, or most, of a deficit arising in a scheme would rest solely with the employer. The existing mechanisms/processes provided for in the Pensions Act such as the development of a funding proposal, remain in place. It is only where this process is not successful in supporting a scheme that the new provisions will apply. The provisions are designed to encourage engagement between employers and trustees in a defined timeline to put in place measures to address a funding deficit.

According to the latest available returns made to the Pensions Authority, approximately 70% of the 677 DB schemes operating as of 31st December 2016 are satisfying the funding standard. Of the schemes that do not meet the funding standard, almost all have funding proposals in place to address funding shortfalls. Of the 677 schemes 22 are currently in wind-up.

Head 13 will not result in any additional costs on employers who remain committed to fulfilling their obligation to their DB scheme. Accordingly, the provision will not result in any additional costs to the sponsoring employers of the 70% of schemes currently meeting the standard or to employers of those schemes which do not meet the funding standard but where a funding proposal is in place.

The provisions seek a middle road between the current position where employers can abandon DB schemes and full and immediate debt on employer provisions. They are to ensure the sustainability of DB schemes for scheme members and continued trust in the pensions system as a whole.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Paternity Leave

206. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of fathers that have taken paternity leave since the introduction of the scheme by county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29286/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Paternity benefit was introduced in September 2016 to support new fathers to take time off work within the first 26 weeks following the birth of their child. The benefit covers two 2 weeks leave and is available to employed and self-employed fathers who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions. It is payable at a rate of €235 per week with possible increases for adult and child dependents.

Application for paternity benefit is available online and customers should be encouraged to use this option as it facilitates the speedy automated determination of entitlement.

Details on the number of people who have received paternity benefit since its introduction in September 2016 to the end of May 2017, by county, are set out in the table below:

Paternity Benefit Claims by County

County	Total Awarded Sept 2016 to May 2017
Carlow	161
Cavan	254
Clare	323
Cork	1841
Donegal	430
Dublin	4007
Galway	860
Kerry	405
Kildare	735
Kilkenny	325
Laois	239
Leitrim	104
Limerick	546
Longford	113
Louth	384
Mayo	387
Meath	628
Monaghan	184

County	Total Awarded Sept 2016 to May 2017
Offaly	239
Roscommon	186
Sligo	206
Tipperary	450
Waterford	348
Westmeath	277
Wexford	427
Wicklow	446
Others	62
TOTAL AWARDS	14,567

Disability Allowance Payments

207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will increase the disability allowance by €20 in budget 2018 with immediate effect; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29287/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Disability allowance (DA) is a means-tested social assistance payment which is paid to persons aged 16 to 66 who are substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment arising from a medical condition (subject to satisfying the relevant medical criteria).

All DA recipients are eligible for the Free Travel Pass, which entitles the bearer to free travel on public transport in Ireland (and certain private services). Depending on the household composition, DA recipients may also be eligible for secondary benefits, such as the Fuel Allowance (€22.50 for the duration of the fuel season) and the Household Benefits Package (€35 per month towards their gas or electricity costs and the free television license worth €160).

Recipients of DA who are living alone also qualify for the Living Alone Allowance (a €9 per week increase to their weekly payment).

Decisions about the appropriate level of the Disability Allowance payment are most appropriately made in a budgetary context and in the light of available resources.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Applications

208. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is being refused the documents they need to certify that they are a jobseeker here in view of the fact that if they wish to leave and return home they will require such documented certification. [29288/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned made an application for jobseekers allowance in the Kilbarrack Intreo Centre in April 2017. This application was refused on the basis that he was not habitually resident in the State. The applicant was informed of this decision in writing and afforded the right of appeal, which he declined.

If a person is unemployed and does not qualify for an unemployment payment, they can sign-on for credits at their local Intreo Centre. A person will get a credit for each full week of proven unemployment.

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The person concerned subsequently moved to Leitrim and visited the Carrick-on-Shannon Intreo office in May 2017 where he made a claim for credited contributions. The Carrick-on-Shannon Intreo Centre has advised that they wrote to the person concerned on Wednesday 21st June, outlining that his claim for job seekers credits has been awarded.

If there is any further clarification the person concerned requires he should be encouraged to contact Carrick-on-Shannon Intreo office.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

Illness Benefit Applications

209. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an illness benefit application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29303/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a payment for persons who are unable to work due to illness and who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions.

The Illness Benefit claim of the person concerned has been approved and payment was due to go into their bank account on Wednesday, 21st June.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

210. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29305/17]

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 the 29th March 2017. The application will be examined by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible. Applications are processed in date of receipt order. Due to the increased volume of applications currently being received, it can currently take 18 weeks to process an application for DCA.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

211. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be entitled to fuel allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29306/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A fuel allowance (FA) is a payment under the National Fuel Scheme to help with the cost of heating a home during the winter months. It is paid to people who are in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments and who also satisfy certain other conditions.

The person concerned is in receipt of carer's allowance from my Department. Carer's allowance is not one of the qualifying payments which may qualify a person for receipt of fuel allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

212. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to introduce an allowance for refuse collection for persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29310/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The introduction of an allowance for pensioners for domestic refuse collection by my Department would not be feasible given the wide range of charging regimes and cost structures that exist in respect of waste management throughout the State. As you know charges vary across local authorities and within local authorities where there is more than one provider. In addition, some local authorities and private operators already operate waiver schemes but again the qualifying conditions for these schemes also vary. Any system put in place to assist people with waste collection charges would have to take account of the different local arrangements.

Furthermore, any decision to introduce a refuse allowance for pensioners would also require extra resources and expenditure and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Administration

213. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the steps she will take to facilitate persons with disabilities that have been told that their existing free travel cards must be replaced by November 2017 with the new public services card; the further steps that are in place for persons in rural or isolated areas with mobility or sight issues for whom travelling to their nearest welfare office means confronting significant difficulties and potential costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29311/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has not yet set any definitive date for the replacement of the old form of paper free travel pass with the new Public Services Card- Free Travel variant (PSC-FT). I am anxious to do this as soon as possible given the benefits of the PSC-FT to both the customers and travel operators. I will not withdraw the use of the old type pass, however, until I am satisfied that all those customers, having regard to their particular circumstances, have had reasonable opportunities and accommodations made available to them to enable them to register for the PSC-FT and to continue to avail of their free travel entitlement.

To date some 2.63 million Public Services Cards (PSC) have been issued and over 80% of customers with a free travel entitlement have been issued with the PSC-FT. Customers not yet registered for the PSC-FT can continue to use the old form of paper free travel pass as it continues to be valid for use with transport operators who are participating in the free travel scheme.

Registration for the PSC usually involves in-person attendance at an office of the Department. PSC registration stations are in place at over 100 locations nationally. Appointments for

registration can be made online, by phone or by simply dropping in. The registration process takes about 15 minutes once all relevant documents are presented.

Where customers are unable to attend in person, other options for registration are available. Selected cohorts have been invited to avail of postal registration including utilisation, with consent, of information already provided to other Government agencies, for example, a photograph supplied in connection with an application for a passport or driving licence. To date, 323,000 people offered this opportunity have been registered via this postal registration process.

In addition, a further 56,000 free travel customers responded recently to a targeted communication from my Department about their particular requirements to complete registration for the PSC-FT. Registration of these customers is now being progressed. Additionally, a mobile registration facility is being rolled out to register customers who face substantial challenges in presenting at a Department location. Group registration at community venues is the preferred mode of utilising these mobile registration facilities but in very exceptional circumstances, single individuals may be registered at their place of residence.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an exceptional needs emergency payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29318/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned submitted an application for supplementary welfare allowance with effect from 29/5/2017. Certain documentation was requested in order to process her application. This documentation is still outstanding.

According to the records of the Department, the person concerned has not submitted an application for an exceptional needs payment. It is open to her to contact her community welfare service if she does not have sufficient means to meet her needs. She should bring all relevant documentation with her in support of her application.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Contracts Data

215. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Social Protection the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of her Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29344/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The cost of all work including investigations, completed by external agencies/consultants during 2015 and 2016 in the areas of human resources and industrial relations contracted out by my Department and by the bodies that come under its aegis are outlined in the following table.

Department/Agency	Cost 2015	Cost 2016
Department of Social Protection	€56,390	€52,551
Citizens Information Board	€53,896	€207,128*
Pensions Authority	€69,157	Nil

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

Disability Allowance Applications

216. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); if same can now be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29396/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 9 May 2017. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

217. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry has had their rate of carer's allowance reduced; if the decision will be reviewed in view of the circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29417/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to a person who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

The Department periodically reviews claims in payment to ensure that there is continued entitlement.

CA is in payment to the person concerned since 23 May 2002 and a review was recently carried out. As part of that review the matter was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance continue to be satisfied.

The outcome of this review was that her weekly means, derived from investments and savings, were found to have increased from when she originally applied for CA.

Accordingly, her weekly payment was reduced from 15 June 2017.

The person concerned was notified on 30 May 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. To date, no appeal has been received from the person concerned.

This case will now be reviewed and the Department will contact the person concerned regarding the outcome of that review.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

218. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will expedite a claim for disability allowance by a person (details supplied). [29419/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Following a successful appeal, the information available to the deciding officer is that this gentleman's family would be financially better off if he included his wife as a qualified adult on his disability allowance claim. His wife is currently in receipt of another social welfare payment at a lower rate than the qualified adult rate. For this reason, an option letter to include his wife has issued to him on 20 June 2017 and we await his instruction.

I trust this clarifies the matter for you.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which all outstanding rent support has been paid up to date in 2017 or is likely to be paid at an early date in the case of a person (details supplied). [29428/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of a full rate of Rent Supplement entitlement based on their monthly rent, weekly income and family composition. All payments for 2017 are up to date.

The person concerned submitted documentation to the Department on 21/6/17, requesting that Rent Supplement payments be issued to an alternate bank account. Accordingly, on the same day, the Department updated her claim in order for future payments to issue to this account, as requested.

The person concerned has been advised to contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) with regard to any dispute arising from unpaid rent arrears.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payment Applications

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if urgent consideration will be given to an exceptional needs payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29433/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the records of the Department, the person concerned has not submitted an application for an exceptional needs payment as a result of difficulties pertaining to the accumulation of outstanding rent arrears.

The person concerned received financial assistance on 8/5/2017 towards the cost of school expenses as a result of costs incurred at the time of the recent death of her mother.

It is open to the person concerned to contact the community welfare service and submit a further application for financial assistance if she does not have sufficient means to meet her

needs.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a disability benefit allowance or invalidity pension has not been made available in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29441/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following an examination of the department's systems it has been determined that the person concerned has not made an application for any payment. If they wish to do so they can complete the necessary application form and submit it to the department for decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Work Allowance Eligibility

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a back to work allowance is not available in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29442/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has met with a departmental case officer on a number of occasions to discuss various self-employment options he was considering and the supports available from the department in this regard.

The back to work enterprise allowance (BTWEA) scheme is available to support persons who are long-term unemployed and wish to develop or take up self-employment opportunities. The scheme allows a qualified person to retain a reducing proportion of their social protection payment, plus secondary benefits over a two year period. However, it is important to note that given the nature of the taxi industry generally, and concerns about displacement of existing operators and viability, it is unlikely that a jobseeker would be approved for BTWEA in respect of taxiing. It is for these reasons that the person concerned has been advised that a BTWEA for this activity will not be approved at present.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an increase in rent support will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29444/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has been requested to submit to the Department documentation in relation to his rent increase that will allow re-assessment of his Rent Supplement claim in line with recent legislation.

The Deputy will be aware that Naas has been designated as a Rental Pressure Zone (RPZ). Under the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, rents are only permitted to be increased according to a prescribed formula by a maximum of 4% annu-

ally.

The person concerned has also been advised to contact the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) should he require further information with regard to this matter.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Motor Tax Exemptions

224. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding motor tax for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29294/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Exemptions in motor tax are provided for in section 1 of the Finance (Excise Duties) (Vehicles) Act 1952 and in regulations made under section 92 of the Finance Act 1989.

Section 1(4)(f) of the 1952 Act (as inserted by section 75(2)(b) of the Finance Act 1991) provides for an exemption for vehicles adapted and used for invalids where the vehicle is less than 400 kilograms in unladen weight, which is the basis of taxation for goods vehicles.

The main scheme for drivers or passengers with disabilities is under section 92 of the 1989 Act. This provides, by way of regulations, for the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme which provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to a 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 for those eligible for relief under the Scheme. The terms of the Scheme are a matter for the Minister for Finance, following consultation with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. In that regard, I refer you to the response of the Minister for Finance to Question No. 115 of 8 November 2016. I understand that the position remains the same and there are no plans to amend the Scheme at this time.

I have no current plans to change motor tax rates or to introduce new exemptions from motor tax for drivers or passengers with disabilities who do not fall within the scope of the existing scheme.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Administration

225. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of lots proposed for the rollout of the SICAP programme; the reason the number of lots has not been reviewed; the reason it is planned to have only one lot in County Galway when the overwhelming view of persons living in Connemara and the islands is that there should be three lots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29451/17]

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.

Planning Issues

226. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there are exemptions from providing a hearing loop for members of the deaf and hard of hearing community with regard to the planning legislation regarding the provision of hearing loops in public places such as theatres and cinemas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29302/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The provision of audible aids in public buildings is not a requirement under the planning code. Rather, it is a requirement of the building regulations. The aim of the building regulations is to provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings. The building regulations apply to the design and construction of a building and to the extension or material alteration of a building. The minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve are set out in the second schedule to the building regulations. These requirements are set out in 12 parts classified as Parts A to M.

The requirements of Part M, Access and Use, provide that adequate provision shall be made for people to access and use a building, its facilities and environs. The accompanying Technical Guidance Document M (TGD M) provides detailed guidance on how this may be achieved in practice.

Audible aids assist people, especially those with hearing impairment, in accessing a building and fully utilising the relevant facilities. There are several types of audible aids including public address systems, audio frequency induction loop systems, infra red systems and radio systems.

TGD M provides detailed guidance in respect of aids to communication in buildings other than dwellings. The objective is to ensure people can independently access and use a building and its facilities; and to facilitate active participation where appropriate. A hearing enhancement system should be provided for people with hearing impairment in all audience and spectator facilities with fixed seating.

In the case of audience and spectator facilities without fixed seating a hearing enhancement system should be provided for people with hearing impairment. This does not include classrooms in primary and post primary schools or standard meeting rooms in offices.

Fire Safety

227. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has requested fire safety examinations of all higher residential, commercial and public buildings in each local authority and fire brigade operational area here following the recent horrific and tragic loss of life at the Grenfell apartments in Kensington, London; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29308/17]

230. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the review by an independent fire expert into a fire at Millfield, Newbridge, and other issues in view of ongoing concern from residents in the development and in further view of the recent fire tragedy in London and the review by local authorities of multi-storey developments [29371/17]

231. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he has taken since the tragic fire at Grenfell, London, to ensure that no social housing here is at risk of fire from the use of combustible materials used in construction or refurbishment. [29374/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227, 230 and 231 together.

Local Authorities across the State already monitor fire safety measures in their multi-storey social housing flats and apartments, under their statutory obligations, and considerable work is already being done in respect of maintaining standards in relation to fire safety generally, with no known immediate cause for concern.

I met with Dublin's Chief Fire Officer last Friday, 16 June, to discuss fire safety and life safety issues in light of the London tragedy. I also requested that the management board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (NDFEM) convene and assess the readiness of the fire authorities to respond to emergencies. In response to this request, the NDFEM Board has confirmed to me that the recent report of the Directorate's External Validation group found that the public are well served by the developed arrangements in place for fire services in Ireland, and concluded that the available evidence provides for confidence regarding the capability of fire services to respond to emergencies.

Each local authority has been requested, 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, the Residential Tenancies Board has been 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. The RTB is coordinating with Local Authority Fire Departments, who are responsible for ensuring compliance, and the National Directorate Fire and Emergency Management to provide detailed information directly and individually to all landlords in the coming days. The RTB is also placing notices to this effect on its website and in the press.

In order to remind builders, assigned certifiers, designers and owners of their obligations in relation to compliance with the Building Regulations, a notification has issued to all registered users (approx. 57,000) through the Building Control Management System (BCMS).

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.

Fire Safety

228. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that sprinkler systems are installed in all higher residential and commercial buildings here and immediately report to Dáil Éireann on the safety of the cladding materials used in all insulation programmes for homes here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29309/17]

232. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will conduct a review of the increased use of combustible materials in house construction and, if necessary, update fire safety regulations and building regulations. [29375/17]

233. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the level of combustible materials being used in all new social housing construction including standard build, refurbishment, rapid build and hubs; and if he is satisfied that the use of such materials does not in any way compromise fire safety in these units. [29376/17]

234. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if cladding (details supplied) can be used in low rise or high rise buildings here under current building regulations; if his Department tracks through the building control management system the use of such cladding materials; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact if it has been used in buildings here. [29418/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 232 to 234, inclusive, together.

The aim of the building regulations is to provide for the safety and welfare of people in and about buildings. The building regulations apply to the design and construction of a building or to an extension or material alteration of a building. The minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve are set out in the second schedule to the building regulations. These requirements are set out in 12 parts classified as Parts A to M.

Technical Guidance Documents (TGDs) provide technical guidance on how to comply with the building regulations in practical terms. TGD B contains guidance, compliance with which will, prima facie, indicate compliance with Part B. The building regulations are subject to ongoing review in the interests of safety and the well-being of persons in the built environment and to ensure that due regard is taken of changes in construction techniques, technological progress and innovation. Part B/TGD B is currently under review and is being split into 2 volumes. Part B/TGD B - Fire Safety - Volume 2 - Dwelling Houses 2017 was published earlier this year and comes into effect on 1 July 2017. Volume 1 is being prepared for public consultation.

TGD B provides guidance on external wall construction in relation to internal and external fire spread, and also refers to other publications for further advice.

Under Part D of the building regulations, Materials and Workmanship, there is an overarching requirement that all works should be carried out using “proper materials...which are fit for the use for which they are intended and for the conditions in which they are to be used” to ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements as prescribed.

Where innovative products are used, third party certification, such as Agrément Certification is a means of demonstrating how products or systems can meet the requirements of the building regulations, including Part B. Care should be taken to read the terms and conditions of such certification and ensure that the content of the certification is strictly adhered to during

construction, in conjunction with the Fire Safety Certificate where relevant.

While it has yet to be definitively confirmed what type of cladding was used in the renovation of Grenfell Tower, the United Kingdom Department of Communities and Local Government has confirmed that Cladding using a composite aluminium panel with a polyethylene core would be non-compliant with current Building Regulations guidance as this material should not be used as cladding on buildings over 18m in height. I can confirm that the same restrictions apply under Irish Building Regulations.

Currently, the Building Regulations do not require provision of sprinklers in all residential and commercial buildings. Provision of sprinklers may arise as a requirement where certain design features are included in buildings, such as phased evacuation in some high rise buildings with floors over 30m above ground level, or as an optional additional feature to facilitate certain building configurations. It is important to note that the building regulations place particular emphasis on adequate means of escape in the case of fire.

The purpose of the Building Control Management System (BCMS) is 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 through facilitating the receipt and lodgement of commencement notices, statutory certificates and compliance documentation in line with the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations.

Departmental Contracts Data

229. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29337/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the years 2015 and 2016 my Department has not paid external agencies or consultants for any work in relation to investigations undertaken in human resources or industrial relations including disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying or dignity at work issues.

Payments were made to external members of interview boards of €1,360 in 2015 and €450 in 2016 in relation to competitions held by my Department.

The issue of work contracted out to external agencies or consultancies is an operational matter for each individual agency or body under the aegis of my Department. My Department does not hold this information in relation to those agencies. However, arrangements have been put in place by each agency or body to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each 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

Agency	Email address
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

Questions Nos. 230 and 231 answered with Question No. 227.

Questions Nos. 232 to 234, inclusive, answered with Question No. 228.

Private Rented Accommodation

235. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if progress can be made in safeguarding the tenancy of persons the property of whom is being sold to an alternative investor with the understanding that the persons can remain in the residence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29434/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented residential sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Act provides that a landlord should allow a tenant of a rented dwelling to enjoy peaceful and exclusive occupation of that dwelling. A landlord is only allowed to enter the property with the tenant's permission or in an emergency. The tenant should agree with the landlord a mutually convenient time to facilitate these viewings so as to minimise disruption. The Residential Tenancies Board provides a telephone-based mediation service which might be useful, if agreement on such matters between landlord and tenant proves difficult.

Planning Issues

236. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to implement planning guidelines regarding the development of solar panel PV farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29447/17]

237. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the need for specific planning guidelines regarding the development of solar panel PV farms. [29448/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 237 together.

There are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Planning and Development Act, each planning authority's development plan

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

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

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

Departmental Contracts Data

238. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the monetary value of all work contracted out under the aegis of his Department to external agencies or consultancies for work completed or investigations undertaken in human resources and industrial relations including hiring and interviewing of staff, disciplinary procedures and workplace related issues such as allegations of bullying and so on or dignity at work issues in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [29335/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Payments made to external agencies in the human resources and industrial relations areas for the Department of Defence in the years 2015 and 2016 are as follows:

Total Figure 2015	Total Figure 2016
€14,279.15	€6,384.25

In addition, from time to time, my Department will engage individuals to serve on interview boards.