

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 15, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 16 to 21, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 22 to 32, inclusive, answered orally.

Road Network

33. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his Department's commitment to upgrade the N2 road in County Meath. [29950/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Within its annual budget the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as the N2) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Ireland has just under 100,000 kilometres of road in its network and the maintenance and improvement of national, regional and local roads places a substantial financial burden on local authorities and on the Exchequer. Because of the national financial position, there have been very large reductions in Exchequer funding available for roads expenditure over the past number of years.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Brexit Negotiations

34. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions he has had with his EU and UK counterparts regarding retaining the single aviation market when the UK exits the European Union; and his views on the position the Government should take in a renegotiation or change to the EU open skies policy. [30169/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Aviation services between the UK and Ireland and within the EU operate within the EU Single Aviation Market. When the UK leaves the EU, an alternative aviation agreement between the UK and the remaining 27 EU Member States will be required.

I have had a number of meetings with my EU counterparts, UK counterparts and the European Commissioner on Brexit, most recently at the Transport Council in Luxembourg. These

meetings were extremely useful in promoting an understanding of transport and tourism Brexit implications for Ireland.

The full implications for Ireland of the UK leaving the single aviation market will only become apparent as formal Brexit negotiations develop.

The aviation sector is critical to Ireland. As an island nation with an open economy, air connectivity is essential for our trading relationships, for all of our industries especially tourism, manufacturing and retail, and for our participation in the global economy generally. Ireland's priority for aviation will be to protect a fully liberalised and deregulated market in order to ensure no erosion of our connectivity or disruption to airlines, airports, business, tourism and personal travel.

In advance of formal negotiations on the specifics of an alternative aviation agreement between the UK and the European Union, it is clear that the consideration may be given to possible transitional or interim arrangements to ensure that existing traffic rights are agreed in a timely fashion. In this manner if a replacement agreement cannot be agreed within the timeframes specified by Article 50 any such arrangements will help to bridge the gap between a withdrawal agreement and an agreed future relationship with the UK to bring certainty to the aviation sector and ensure continuity of vital air services.

Public Transport Initiatives

35. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress which has been made towards the establishment of a public transport stakeholder dialogue as per the Labour Court recommendation arising from the Bus Éireann dispute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29982/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that I am committed to a dialogue with all public transport stakeholders in order to advance the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to start a review of public transport policy.

I believe that this broad dialogue will allow for all stakeholders, including trade unions, a chance to inform the development of public transport policy in Ireland. I look forward to that dialogue and the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Preparations for the dialogue are at an early stage and I am sure the Deputy can appreciate that there will be a considerable level of organisation and scheduling required if we are to have the type of meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas that I think we all want.

In advance of this dialogue, I have invited representatives of all CIÉ trade unions, as well as ICTU, to meet with me and explain their issues of concern as expressed in recent months. Invitations issued last week and the meeting will take place in early July. I believe this meeting will provide unions with an opportunity to voice their views to me directly in relation to any issues of policy concern they might have.

I think the type of dialogue with stakeholders that I am about to initiate comes at an important time in terms of how we want to shape our public transport services. There are a number of important initiatives underway which will directly impact and influence the development of public transport in future years. I think it opportune that all those with an interest in public transport are given an opportunity to voice their views and ideas for the future.

Rail Services Provision

36. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with the significant financial shortfall in Iarnród Éireann especially with regard to the capital budget for the rail network; and his views on whether closing certain rail lines is a potential solution. [30171/17]

46. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures which have been considered by his Department to deal with the apparently serious financial situation at Iarnród Éireann including investment in the company and in relevant infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29961/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 36 and 46 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) held a public consultation process to start a national debate on the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. The public consultation process was launched with the publication of a *Rail Review 2016 Report*, which examined the funding required to support the heavy rail network now and into the future, together with a consultation document “The Role of Rail in Ireland and Funding its Delivery”. The report provided an analysis of the company’s financial situation, some funding solutions and proposals to grow passenger numbers.

Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA is preparing a report of those submissions.

In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines or investment in the company and its relevant infrastructure.

As noted within the *Rail Review Report*, its analysis predates the finalisation of the National Planning Framework which is being developed at present under the leadership of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. It is obvious that, once agreed by Government, the approach which that Framework adopts toward land-use planning and settlement patterns for the country will have significant impacts on the potential of rail and other transport infrastructure and services into the future. I look forward to the finalisation and adoption by Government in the coming months of the new National Planning Framework, which I believe will form an important context for my consideration of issues raised by the *Rail Review Report* and any recommendations I will bring to Government.

Road Improvement Schemes

37. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding programme under which the renovation of two bridges (details supplied) in County Donegal has been approved; the timeframe for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30144/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities’ own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

The economic reality of recent years has meant significant reductions in roads budgets

across the board and this resulted in some grant programmes being curtailed, including the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes, in order to protect funding for road maintenance and repair and this remains the position in 2017.

While the Capital Plan 2016-2021 does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network it will take some years yet to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. There is, therefore, limited scope at present for funding for projects under either the Specific or Strategic Grant Programmes.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under those Grant Programmes are assessed by my Department on a case-by-case basis, with particular consideration given to higher cost Bridge Rehabilitation Works, significant safety schemes and improvement works that promote employment. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind.

It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement local authorities in their spending in this area.

Park and Ride Facilities

38. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allocate a budget for the provision of park and ride facilities in a number of towns (details supplied) in County Kildare in which the requirement for park and ride is crucial in order to increase usage of public transport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30199/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the provision of Park and Ride facilities in County Kildare.

The National Transport Authority's (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035 includes the planned development of a network of strategic rail-based park and ride facilities where rail services intersect with the national road network. It is proposed that these facilities would be located at Swords, Finglas, Dunboyne, Liffey Valley, Naas Road, Carrickmines, Woodbrook and Greystones. The Strategy indicates that further development of local park and ride facilities will also be considered at appropriate locations on the rail network in the outer parts of the Dublin metropolitan network and hinterland.

In addition, the NTA recently launched the *BusConnects* initiative which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in Dublin that will involve, inter alia, the development of a network of 'next generation' bus corridors and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations.

As the Deputy will be aware, a mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway and in my Department's submission to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform I have sought a significant increase in funding for public transport investment to support these initiatives. The extent to which the park and ride network - both the rail-based and bus-based network - can be rolled out will be dependent on the level of additional funding that may become available for public transport following the completion of the mid-term review of the

Capital Plan.

Aviation Industry Regulations

39. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 48 of 10 May 2017, the progress made on the promised review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended. [29942/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I outlined in my response on 10 May last I decided recently that my Department should conduct an internal review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, as amended. Such a review is timely, given the age of that Order and the subsequent changes to international law since 1973, particularly as regards the transport of dangerous goods by air.

In the first instance this will be an internal review in my Department, to identify the options available for updating various aspects of the Order. Given that so many aspects of the current Order require review, taking into account legislation at EU level and internationally at the International Civil Aviation Organisation, it is likely that implementing the recommendations of the review would require a new Statutory Instrument to replace existing legislative provisions.

In addition to compatibility with EU and International law, other issues that may be examined in the review would be the role of other Ministers and agencies in the granting of exemptions under the order, the legal definitions of civil aircraft and state aircraft, the requirement for permits for each individual aircraft operation, the application of the order to Irish registered aircraft outside of Irish airspace, issues related to the carriage of firearms by certain categories of law enforcement officers and finally the provisions of the order relating to monitoring, enforcement, inspection and offences.

I would then envisage a public consultation taking place in order to ensure that any proposed changes are considered in an open and transparent manner. I would hope it is possible to begin this wider public consultation process before the end of the year.

Tourist Accommodation

40. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures his Department is taking to address the very significant cost inflation in accommodation and other items in Dublin being experienced by overseas visitors; and his views on whether a special body under the aegis of his Department should be tasked with examining the way to address this issue to protect the reputation of the tourism sector. [30172/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): A shortage of available hotel bedrooms in Dublin city has caused hotel room rates to increase in recent years. While I welcome the improved viability of the sector and accept the need for a fair return on investment, hotels must ensure that this is done at an appropriate rate and in a way that visitors perceive as reasonable. This is a point made frequently by both Minister Ross and my predecessor and one which I will also be stressing in my own engagements with the industry.

I have no plans to establish a dedicated body to monitor and address tourism competitive-

ness issues. These are tracked and monitored by my Department and the tourism agencies on an ongoing basis.

For example, I am informed by Fáilte Ireland that the most recent information available to them indicates that the rate of increase in hotel room pricing is slowing. Furthermore, Fáilte Ireland's most recent assessment of hotel accommodation in Dublin indicates that there should be sufficient stock to meet projected demand after 2018, with approximately 5,500 bedrooms coming on stream by 2020, which should further moderate price increases.

Revised Hotel Regulations introduced last August should also make investment more attractive by allowing hotel operators provide more rooms and operate at a lower cost base, thus improving hotel capacity, competitiveness and profitability. Consumers should also benefit from this change.

More broadly, the Government has continued a range of supportive measures, such as the reduced VAT rate, aimed at enhancing competitiveness.

I welcome Fáilte Ireland research which shows a significant improvement in overseas visitors' perception of value for money in Ireland. Nonetheless, I urge the tourist industry to remain vigilant and to maintain a focus on value and competitiveness. To do otherwise could seriously jeopardise continued growth.

Tourism Policy

41. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to calls by an organisation (details supplied) for emergency measures to be put in place to solve a shortage of chefs across the country (details supplied); the status of the CERT national hospitality training centre in Amiens Street; and his views on whether 5,000 chefs will be needed to fill vacancies by 2018. [29964/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I am aware of calls for the re-establishment of CERT, the Council for Education, Recruitment and Training. CERT was dissolved in 2003 upon the establishment of Fáilte Ireland under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003. In line with other sectors, education and training for the hospitality sector is primarily funded and delivered through the higher and further education, and training bodies, namely the Institutes of Technology and the Education and Training Boards, with complementary training and business supports provided by Fáilte Ireland.

There are no plans to establish a dedicated training organisation for the tourism and hospitality sector.

The further development of training will be guided by the ongoing work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, which is a matter for the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Skills and Labour Market Research undertaken by SOLAS. A Hospitality Skills Oversight Group was established in early 2016 to ensure the skills needs of the hospitality sector are met.

Fáilte Ireland has certain statutory functions, including promoting and supporting the recruitment, training, and education and development, of people for the purpose of employment in connection with the tourism industry in the State. Fáilte Ireland's priorities within the tourism industry are for on-site practical training interventions to boost productivity and sustain employment.

With specific regard to chef training, Fáilte Ireland is playing a leading role in the development of a culinary apprenticeship programme through its participation, together with industry stakeholders, on a consortium collaborating on its development. I am pleased to say that good progress is being made in the development of the apprenticeship programme and it is expected that the first intake of apprentices will commence in the autumn.

Road Projects Status

42. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to recommence the design stage of the A5/N2 to address the potential impacts from Brexit; if Monaghan County Council can be briefed on these plans; and if funding will be available to the council. [29940/17]

59. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will allocate funding to allow Monaghan County Council recommence the design stage of the A5/N2 and select the preferred route to address the potential impacts from Brexit. [29939/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42 and 59 together.

As the Deputy is aware, while I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as the N2) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

The Capital Plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. Maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway. In this context it was not possible to include a range of projects in the Plan (including the N2 Clontibret to the Border scheme) given the overall funding envelope available.

The Capital Review is now underway and a number of local authorities (including Monaghan County Council) have made submissions to my Department outlining the case for funding for roads and my Department is making a strong case for additional funding, including the development of a project pipeline for road schemes. While there is a strong case for additional funding for the transport sector, there are a multitude of possible national, regional and local projects around the country, the cost of which far exceed available funding and unfortunately, this means that only a limited number can be put forward for funding.

The final decisions on allocations are, however, matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Government as a whole.

Concerning the A5 scheme, as outlined to the Deputy in my reply to PQ 12318/17 of 8 March 2017 and PQ 23352/17 of 16 May, the planning and implementation (including the design) of the A5 project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. As the Deputy is aware, the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start - reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50m for the A5 project and committed an additional £25m to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane)

can commence as soon as the planning process in Northern Ireland has been concluded.

Road Safety Strategy

43. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the Staying Alive at 1.5 initiative aimed at protecting cyclists and other vulnerable roads users; his legislative plans regarding minimum overtaking distances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30207/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There has been a worrying increase in deaths among cyclists during 2017, which is particularly concerning as overall road deaths are down on last year.

Ensuring greater safety for cyclists, and other road users, requires measures across a wide range of areas, and the Road Safety Authority, An Garda Síochána and others are continuing to pursue a variety of initiatives under the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020.

I am well aware of the 'Stayin' Alive at 1.5' initiative, and I share its goal of ensuring cycle safety. However, I am also aware that An Garda Síochána have repeatedly stated that the introduction of a mandatory passing distance would not be enforceable. I know that a number of other countries do have mandatory passing distances, but it is important to recognise that these jurisdictions have very different legal and constitutional contexts.

Aside from the challenge of enforcement, including demonstrating to the satisfaction of a court that distance measurements are accurate, there are practical challenges with a mandatory passing distance. For example, if a motorist and a cyclist were less than 1.5 metres apart and it was the cyclist who had moved into that position, would the motorist be committing an offence? Given that we have many narrow roads, would a mandatory passing distance force drivers to move dangerously far to the other side of the road?

It is not clear that such a law would be practicable. It is arguably more effective to educate both drivers and cyclists about safe behaviour on our roads. In that regard I welcome the current campaign by the Road Safety Authority advising motorists to use 1.5m outside 50 km/hour zones, and 1m inside them. I intend to work with the RSA to further highlight this message, so that this rule of thumb will be followed where practicable and safe rather than turning breaches of it into a criminal offence.

Tourism Promotion

44. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allocate a specific marketing budget to Fáilte Ireland to promote County Donegal specifically, further to the county being nominated by a magazine (details supplied) as the coolest place on the planet to visit in 2017 and Donegal Airport being named the second most scenic airport in the world; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29938/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the boards and management of the two tourism agencies - Tourism Ireland in regard to overseas tourism marketing and Fáilte Ireland in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for promoting the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination and undertakes extensive marketing campaigns in 23 key source

markets for tourism to Ireland. Within Ireland, individual counties may compete for domestic visitors. Research carried out for Tourism Ireland indicates that the level of awareness of Ireland's county boundaries is low among potential overseas visitors, and therefore expenditure by public or private entities on marketing an individual county to consumers in overseas markets is unlikely to provide an adequate return on investment.

I am delighted that National Geographic Traveller has named Donegal at the top of its list of 'coolest places to visit' in 2017. Donegal features prominently in Tourism Ireland's global marketing activity. For example last autumn, filming took place at places like Malin Head, Fanad Lighthouse, Glenveagh National Park and Slieve League in Donegal for Tourism Ireland footage of the Donegal section of the Wild Atlantic Way. Tourism Ireland has rolled out a series of Wild Atlantic Way advertising campaigns in overseas markets over the past year, in which Donegal has featured.

Donegal, and the accolade received from National Geographic Traveller, are highlighted on Tourism Ireland's suite of international websites as well as through Tourism Ireland's social media platforms. Donegal continues to be extensively promoted through a series of Wild Atlantic Way adverts and will feature in the upcoming Star Wars film providing a superb promotional opportunity. Tourism Ireland also works with overseas travel, lifestyle and special interest media as part of their overseas promotional programme. I understand that Tourism Ireland recently provided details of such campaigns to the Deputy.

Donegal Airport certainly benefits from a very scenic approach and the recent publicity it received is welcome, both for the airport and the county. Tourism Ireland has, since 2015, supported direct access to regional airports through its Regional Air Access Cooperative Fund. This provides for funding to be made available where it is matched by carriers or airports in order to exploit marketing opportunities for direct access. I understand that Donegal Airport has availed of this fund in the past and would encourage it do so again.

I understand that Aer Lingus has announced they are interlining routes to Donegal (Carrickfinn) from Schipol Airport in Amsterdam and Charles de Gaulle in Paris. Tourism Ireland and Aer Lingus are trialling a new interlining initiative (to the end of October 2017) to make it easier for French and Dutch visitors to fly into Donegal Airport (Carrickfinn). This new pilot scheme means that visitors can travel Charles de Gaulle/Dublin/Donegal or Schipol/Dublin/Donegal with tickets issued all the way through and baggage transferred automatically all the way through to Donegal airport (so there is no need to reclaim luggage at Dublin and check in again for onward travel to Donegal). Tourism Ireland will promote the new scheme.

In 2016, Fáilte Ireland invested €1.7m on marketing the Wild Atlantic Way and, along with the local authorities from Donegal to Galway, have co-funded a marketing campaign in Great Britain in 2017 in which Donegal features heavily.

Sport Ireland Administration

45. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Sport Ireland has delayed in responding to the application for additional funding for the national women's soccer team for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30131/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, provides funding to the FAI from its Youth Field Sports Programme and its Women in Sport Programme. Funding of €2.7 million was provided to the FAI last year. Sport Ireland intend to announce the 2017 allocation

to the FAI shortly. Youth Field Sports funding is aimed at increasing participation in football by young people. The Women in Sport funding is for the grassroots development of women's football and funds participation initiatives for adult women.

Sport Ireland has informed me that, following receipt of an application from the FAI for additional funding for the Women's National Team for 2017, the request was considered by the Board of Sport Ireland at the same time as other applications made by the FAI for funding in 2017. There was no undue delay. The applications were brought before the Board of Sport Ireland on June 14th. The Board of Sport Ireland decided that, given their current budgetary position, Sport Ireland is not in a position to support this initiative at this time. This decision was communicated to the FAI on June 15th. I am also informed by Sport Ireland that they will keep the matter under consideration as part of the budgetary process for 2018.

In terms of other supports, Sport Ireland informs me that, following a request from the FAI, the Women's National Team has access to the Sport Ireland Institute services and facilities. I intend to raise the matter with both the FAI and Sport Ireland when I meet with both in the near future.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 36.

Cycling Policy

47. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to improve cycling safety in view of the fact that there have been more fatalities to date in 2017 than the entirety of 2016. [30175/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The creation of a safer cycling environment is a priority for me and I share the Deputy's concern regarding the figures this year.

The greatest risks are where many different road users share space. Hence, in 2017, funding of just under €30 million has been allocated by the NTA under the Sustainable Transport Management grant scheme for the Greater Dublin Area and for the Regional Cities. This funding will be allocated to Cycling and Walking projects and Bus Priority measures, enabling better segregation of users. In 2016 the funding for the GDA was €21.22m and over 80% of this was spent on Cycling and Walking projects, with similar expected for 2017.

I am acutely aware of the need for more and better cycling infrastructure and I am seeking additional funding for it as part of the mid-term review of the Capital Investment Plan.

Infrastructure is a part of the solution but it is not all of the solution. How all road users behave is also important. I understand from the Road Safety Authority (RSA) that the deaths of people cycling in recent years have been spread across urban and rural locations and on every type of road (National, Regional, Local). While we all are free to use the road safely, we also all have the responsibility to ensure that our driving or cycling does not impact on that. It is up to all road users to be attentive and the RSA have highlighted the dangers of distracted driving and the importance of passing cyclists at a reasonable distance.

My Department has also allocated €350,000 for the purpose of subsidising participating schools for training in the new standard *Cycle Right*, with additional funding from the RSA, and with Cycling Ireland administering and managing the scheme registration.

I intend, with the RSA, to further highlight the need for all road users to take account of the

vulnerability of cyclists in the coming weeks, as I am conscious that the numbers of people cycling generally peaks at this time of year.

Tourism Promotion

48. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will liaise with Fáilte Ireland to ensure that there is a marketing budget put in place to further promote County Donegal further to the county being nominated by a magazine (details supplied) as the coolest place on the planet to visit in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29937/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the boards and management of the two tourism agencies - Tourism Ireland in regard to overseas tourism marketing and Fáilte Ireland in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for promoting the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination and undertakes extensive marketing campaigns in 23 key source markets for tourism to Ireland. Within Ireland, individual counties may compete for domestic visitors. Research carried out for Tourism Ireland indicates that the level of awareness of Ireland's county boundaries is low among potential overseas visitors, and therefore expenditure by public or private entities on marketing an individual county to consumers in overseas markets is unlikely to provide an adequate return on investment.

I am delighted that National Geographic Traveller has named Donegal at the top of its list of 'coolest places to visit' in 2017. Donegal features prominently in Tourism Ireland's global marketing activity. For example last autumn, filming took place at places like Malin Head, Fanad Lighthouse, Glenveagh National Park and Slieve League in Donegal for Tourism Ireland footage of the Donegal section of the Wild Atlantic Way. Tourism Ireland has rolled out a series of Wild Atlantic Way advertising campaigns in overseas markets over the past year, in which Donegal has featured.

Donegal, and the accolade received from National Geographic Traveller, are highlighted on Tourism Ireland's suite of international websites as well as through Tourism Ireland's social media platforms. Donegal continues to be extensively promoted through a series of Wild Atlantic Way adverts and will feature in the upcoming Star Wars film providing a superb promotional opportunity. Tourism Ireland also works with overseas travel, lifestyle and special interest media as part of their overseas promotional programme. I understand that Tourism Ireland recently provided details of such campaigns to the Deputy.

In 2016, Fáilte Ireland invested €1.7m on marketing the Wild Atlantic Way and, along with the local authorities from Donegal to Galway, have co-funded a marketing campaign in Great Britain in 2017 in which Donegal features heavily.

Taxi Regulations

49. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the new legislation being prepared by the Government to regulate the use of rickshaws in cities and towns across the State; the way this legislation will be effective in allowing for the regulation of these vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29960/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following consideration of proposals from the National Transport Authority (NTA) and legal advice which I received, I am proceeding with the drafting of Heads of a Bill to provide for a new Part to be inserted to the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 exclusively for the regulation of rickshaws. The approach will, amongst things, ensure that

- the relevant interactions with the existing legislative framework under the 2013 Act for small public service vehicles (taxis, hackneys and limousines), are properly integrated;

- the definition of ‘rickshaw’ will encompass all known types of rickshaw, in particular the most prevalent type of rickshaw in operation which has an electric motor which provides assistance to the person pedalling the rickshaw, and

- the principles and policies will be set out in primary legislation as to the matters which the NTA may provide for in regulations, thereby giving the NTA the necessary powers to regulate.

To inform the detailed drafting process I have also tasked the NTA with conducting a public consultation, as the views of key stakeholders and the public will be important in devising an appropriate regulatory regime for rickshaws. The consultation will, amongst other things, seek to elicit information on existing rickshaw operators in relation to the scale and type of operations and users experience of rickshaws including fares charged and issues they have experienced, as well as operators’/drivers’ and the public’s views on how operators/drivers and vehicles should be regulated. I am advised that the NTA intends to initiate the consultation process in early July. Early consultation on proposals to legislate will mean that feedback can be used constructively and a broad consensus secured.

I share the concerns which have been raised about the need for regulation of rickshaws and it is my intention to progress the drafting of the Heads of a Bill without delay

Park and Ride Facilities

50. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to identify a bus park and ride facility on the N7 near Rathcoole, County Dublin (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29957/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In light of the National Transport Authority’s responsibility for the *BusConnects* initiative, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Authority for direct reply on the issue raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Provision

51. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Road Traffic (Traffic and Parking) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2012, SI 332 of 2012, that was to make cycle tracks non-mandatory except for contraflow tracks and tracks in pedestrianised areas in view of the fact that the regulations do not provide for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29946/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While it may have been the Department’s intention at the time of the introduction of the amendment to the Regulations in 2012 to only make the use of contraflow cycle track and of any cycle track in pedestrianised area mandatory, this is not how the Regulations are set out.

The Department is currently consulting with the Road Safety Authority and An Garda Síochána and has sought their views on the relevant provisions. Before any amendments are considered to clarify the situation in relation to the circumstances surrounding the mandatory use of cycle lanes, this Department will have to satisfy itself that any such measures strike an appropriate balance between the views of all stakeholders from a road safety perspective. A detailed report on this issue is expected from the RSA shortly.

Bus Éireann

52. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to meet with Bus Éireann worker representatives to discuss the future of the company and transport nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30191/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have invited representatives of all CIÉ trade unions, as well as ICTU, to meet with me and explain their issues of concern as expressed in recent months. Invitations issued last week and the meeting will take place in early July. I believe this meeting will provide unions with an opportunity to voice their views to me directly in relation to any issues of policy concern they might have.

The Deputy is also aware that I committed to a dialogue with all public transport stakeholders in order to advance the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to start a review of public transport policy.

I believe that this broad dialogue will allow for all stakeholders, including trade unions, a chance to inform the development of public transport policy in Ireland. I look forward to that dialogue and the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

Cycling Facilities Provision

53. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if plans for a cycle way from Sutton to Balbriggan in north County Dublin can be fast tracked; the funding that is available for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30206/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

Under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme, my Department provides funding to the NTA for the seven local authorities in the GDA for the implementation of sustainable transport projects including cycling/walking infrastructure, Quality Bus Corridors, safety, integration and traffic management projects throughout the region.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply with regard to this particular project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which, in the context of a capital expenditure review, he plans to address strategic in-

frastructural deficits in the transport area with particular reference to road, bus and rail services, bridges and existing networks incapable of dealing with traffic volumes; his further plans to make major announcements in this area in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30130/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The existing capital plan provides almost €10bn for transport investment which is a significant portion of the overall capital envelope available to 2021 and underlines the importance of transport to Ireland's future growth and prosperity. A mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway by Government to determine capital investment priorities over the remaining 4 years of the existing plan in the context of a growing economy, where congestion has the potential to impede that growth. I have made a detailed and compelling case for increased investment which will seek to address infrastructural deficits in the transport area and address congestion issues particularly in urban areas as the Deputy rightly points out.

Land Transport is the largest programme by far in my Department's Vote, representing 80% of my overall budget. The main components of the programme are: roads improvement and maintenance funding with an overall budget of €760m. The public transport investment programme has a budget of €355m.

In 2017, this funding will provide for:

- the completion of the LUAS Cross City project. I expect to see the first trams operating on the line before the end of the year.

- the funding of over 180 new buses comprising double and single deck buses and coaches, with 110 buses for the Dublin region fleet and over 70 buses for the Bus Éireann fleet. This will significantly enhance the quality and efficiency of the bus fleet serving both urban and rural areas;

- the funding for essential planning and design work on some of the important but longer-term projects such as Metro North and the DART Expansion Programme.

- the essential maintenance and renewal of the heavy rail network to ensure it is safe and fit for purpose;

- significant investment of €303m in our national roads to ensure they are maintained properly;

 - further contractual payments towards the Public Private Partnership roads programme;

 - significant investment of €324m in our regional and local roads network; and

 - funding to advance key roads investments, including the widening the N7 around Naas and the linked work on the Sallins Bypass and access to the Millennium Business Park

 - as well as preparatory work and planning on the projects in the Capital Plan, such as the Dunkettle upgrade, and the N4 from Collooney to Castlebaldwin

Driver Licences

55. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 589 of 30 May 2017, if he will provide a report on this paper; his plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29954/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Further to the Deputy's previous question in relation to the future use of the microchip on the plastic card style driver licences, this matter is still subject to consideration by my Department and I have nothing further to add to my previous answer at this time.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

56. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether his Department and transport agencies under its aegis are doing enough to promote the use of the European Fund for Strategic Investments in terms of identifying and carrying out background work on public infrastructure projects that may meet the criteria for project selection in terms of additionality and revenue generation and may attract private co-financing investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30170/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to PQ 30503/17 Lottery 1 of the 28th June 2017.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

57. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has had discussions with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on the provision of extra current and capital funding for transport in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29953/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am in regular contact with my colleague, Paschal Donohoe, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the provision of funding for transport. The existing capital plan provides almost €10bn for transport investment which is a significant portion of the overall capital envelope available to 2021 and underlines the importance of transport to Ireland's future growth and prosperity.

A mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway by Government to determine capital investment priorities over the remaining 4 years of the existing plan in the context of a growing economy, where congestion has the potential to impede that growth. I have made a detailed and compelling case for increased investment in maintaining and developing our transport network to address congestion and facilitate economic activity throughout the country.

I look forward to engaging more intensively with Minister Donohoe over the coming months in the lead up to Budget 2018 when final decisions will be taken by Government. Transport is a key priority for Government and I am confident that it will be given the appropriate level of attention particularly in defining a new 10 year perspective for capital investment.

Separately, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has commenced an overall Spending Review, covering both capital and current funding. My Department's input to that Spending Review will form part of the Government's deliberations on Budget 2018.

Tourism Promotion

58. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made to date on the rebranding of a midlands tourism strategy and the proposed business plan by Fáilte Ireland to serve midlands counties including Longford and Westmeath; when this plan

will be finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29975/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): 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 and I do not have a direct role in relation to the development of branding strategies.

In the final quarter of 2016 and in line with the Programme for Government commitment to develop the 'Ireland's Lakelands' brand, Fáilte Ireland commissioned a Destination and Feasibility study to ascertain the potential growth and best mechanism to unlock those areas that lie between the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East. A consortium of Colliers, Red C and DKM was engaged to conduct the study. I am informed by Fáilte Ireland that the study is now complete and it has suggested a number of options to create a distinctive tourism brand for the midlands. The next step for Fáilte Ireland is to develop and test the available options. I understand that Fáilte Ireland is scheduled to commence this work immediately and that this will involve engagement with local stakeholders.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for further information on this matter and for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 42.

Tourism Policy

60. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has considered reviewing the current training and education structures in the tourism sector with a view to considering the establishment of a distinct specialised training service for those who work or intend to work in the tourism industry, including chefs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29959/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Department of Education and Skills has overall responsibility for skills development policy generally across all sectors, including hospitality and tourism, and oversees the bulk of the required education and training delivered nationally through the mainstream higher and further education and training sectors.

There are no plans to establish a new training organisation or other oversight body for the tourism and hospitality sector specifically. Rather, projected skills demands across the economy are being addressed through a combination of measures involving various key stakeholders.

For its part, Fáilte Ireland provides some complementary tourism-related business development and training supports in line with its responsibility for encouraging, promoting and supporting tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy.

Furthermore, in line with my Department's Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018, Fáilte Ireland is committed to working with the tourism industry and the wider education and training sector to implement recommendations relating to the hospitality sector in the report of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). In this regard, Fáilte Ireland participates in the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group, which oversees skills development and promotion in the sector, including monitoring the implementation of the EGFSN recommendations.

With specific regard to chef training, Fáilte Ireland is playing a leading role in the development of a culinary apprenticeship programme through its participation, together with industry stakeholders, on the consortium collaborating on its development. I am pleased to say that good progress is being made in the development of the apprenticeship programme and it is expected that the first intake of apprentices will commence in the autumn.

Road Network

61. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to deal with the increasing travel demand across the Dublin region in general; the position regarding the implementation of the Leinster outer orbital ring road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30198/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I fully recognise that there is considerable evidence emerging of increased travel demand across the Dublin Region in general.

Insofar as congestion issues in Dublin are concerned, the National Transport Authority's (NTA) *Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area* provides the overarching framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services over the next two decades. Addressing urban congestion on both the strategic road network and locally in certain locations is an important theme in the Strategy. The measures proposed are linked to an analysis of current and projected levels of travel demand across the region.

The Strategy does not include the implementation of the Leinster Outer Orbital during its lifetime. Large scale projects proposed in the Strategy include the DART Expansion Programme, New Metro North, and various other light rail projects. While funding is provided in the Capital Plan to commence construction of new Metro North and to progress electrification of the Northern line to Balbriggan, these projects will not be delivered in the short to medium term. Therefore, the most realistic option to meaningfully tackle congestion in the short to medium term is to radically improve the bus system to deliver a step change in performance across the GDA and to complement that improved public transport system with a network of park and ride sites.

In this connection, the NTA launched *BusConnects* last month. *BusConnects* involves a suite of measures to transform Dublin's Bus System including the development of a network of "next generation" bus corridors with segregated cycling, a complete redesign of bus network, development of three bus rapid transit routes, simpler fare structure, and a cashless payment system. This initiative is currently at public consultation stage and I look forward to it being progressed.

I must also highlight that already planned projects for the period 2015-2018 which include Luas Cross City, the Phoenix Park Tunnel, additional bus fleet and bus lane infrastructure, small scale interventions on the M50 and numerous other measures will go some way to addressing growing travel demand. However, we must look to a greatly strengthened bus system as the basis for tackling congestion. This requires a step-change in funding and I have made a strong case for increased public transport investment as part of the Mid-Term Review of the Government's Capital Plan.

Bus Services

62. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to

the publication of “Bus Connects” recently by the NTA and in view of the traffic congestion in Dublin, the reason Dublin mid-west N4 and N7 corridors have not been identified as a location for the proposed bus rapid transport network by the NTA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29956/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In light of the National Transport Authority’s responsibility for the *BusConnects* initiative, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Authority for direct reply on the issue raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Light Rail Projects

63. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide a light rail service to Cork city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29958/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There are currently no plans to develop a light rail system in Cork. The focus of the €3.6 billion investment in the Public Transport Capital Programme over the 7-year period of the Capital Plan, particularly in the early years, is on achieving essential *steady state* maintenance of our public transport network to ensure that it remains safe and fit for purpose.

Funding is provided under the Capital Plan for public transport projects and accessibility programmes in the Regional Cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. These programmes are administered by the National Transport Authority and fund projects such as bus lanes, green routes, cycle lanes, safety measures for pedestrians/cyclists and to upgrade public transport infrastructure and facilities to help improve transport accessibility. Over €70m has been allocated over the period of the Capital Plan for projects under the Regional Cities and Accessibility programmes.

The public transport needs of Cork will be kept under review in the context of on-going public transport planning and available funding. The Deputy will be aware that a mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway. I will be seeking to significantly improve the funding available for public transport over the remaining years of the Plan in order to meet increasing demand, tackle congestion in our cities in particular and to help deliver on meeting our climate obligations by reducing emissions from the transport sector.

Tourism Industry

64. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the CERT in Amiens Street ceased offering chef training in 2011; and if the building is still equipped to train chefs. [29965/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): C.E.R.T. Limited was dissolved in 2003 upon the establishment of Fáilte Ireland (the National Tourism Development Authority) under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003.

The matters raised by the Deputy are operational matters for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland in line with its statutory functions. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy’s question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive

a reply within ten working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

65. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the non national road specific improvement grants programme; the way in which local authority prioritisation of projects influences funding decisions; the criteria used to fund projects without local authority prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30145/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities' own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

The economic reality of recent years has meant significant reductions in roads budgets across the board and this resulted in some grant programmes being curtailed, including the Specific and Strategic Grant Programmes, in order to protect funding for road maintenance and repair and this remains the position in 2017.

While the Capital Plan 2016-2021 does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network it will take some years yet to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. There is, therefore, limited scope at present for funding for projects under either the Specific or Strategic Grant Programmes.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under those Grant Programmes are assessed by my Department on a case-by-case basis, with particular consideration given to higher cost Bridge Rehabilitation Works, significant safety schemes and improvement works that promote employment. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and the Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind. It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement local authorities in their spending in this area.

Electric Vehicles

66. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the additional measures he is implementing and considering to support the roll-out of electric vehicles across the country. [30174/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Government is committed to facilitating an increased uptake of electric vehicles (EVs). As the Deputy is aware, my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have jointly convened an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Task Force to consider a full suite of potential measures to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies, particularly EVs, under a commitment outlined in the "Programme for a Partnership Government". The wide ranging work of the Taskforce has been divided between three working groups addressing: Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility; Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing; and Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership.

Some potential policy instruments being analysed by the Taskforce include: reduced charges or exemptions on toll roads for EVs; availability and focus of benefit-in-kind relief; EV public parking charges; current public procurement policy; and the effectiveness of the current incentives in place. The Taskforce is also considering the role of taxation in the accelerated deployment of low emission vehicles.

An opportunity will be provided in July for industry and user stakeholders to contribute their perspectives to the deliberations of the Task Force and further wider consultations will be also be undertaken later this year.

In addition, actions to support a transition to LEVs were included in the *National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport: 2017-2030*, which I published recently. The *Framework* aims to remove barriers to the uptake of LEVs by addressing such infrastructure requirements as EV charging points. The *Framework* sets an ambitious target that by 2030 all new cars and vans sold in Ireland will be zero emissions (or zero emissions capable), reducing our dependence on the use of conventional fossil fuels for transport. Ireland has in place one of the more comprehensive charging networks in Europe, with nearly 900 charge points currently available for EV drivers.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

67. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the stage the sports capital grants adjudication process is at; when they will be announced; the total budget for 2017; if the allocation will be on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29976/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): All of the 2,320 applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme (SCP) are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. A total of €30m has been provided for the scheme. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete the assessment process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

The full scoring system and assessment procedures for the 2017 round of the SCP has been published on my Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-scoring-system-and-assessment-procedures/assessment-manual-2017-scp.pdf>

Question No. 68 resubmitted.

Bus Services

69. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the NTA's plans to redesign the Dublin Bus network; if this redesign will impact on Dublin Bus's operation of its existing routes; if private operators are being given the tender to operate newly designed routes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30190/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Dáil Question No. 1814 on 20 June 2017 on this matter. The position is as outlined in that reply.

Ports Development

70. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on ongoing discussions between his Department, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company with regard to the future governance of the harbour; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30188/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The process of transferring governance of Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council is ongoing. This process and the future operational structures of the port are primarily matters for agreement between the Council and the port.

Following publication of the due diligence report on 9 January 2017 Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council engaged a risk and finance consultant to carry out a Risk Assessment of the company prior to transfer. This will enable the Council to fully understand the implications of models of transfer and the responsibility that will transfer in financial and other terms.

Officials from my Department met with the Risk Assessor on 31 January 2017 to give the shareholder perspective on National Ports Policy and to explain the different models of transfer. Clarification was sought from my officials in April in relation to whether there was a necessity to have a Non Disclosure Agreement signed regarding commercially sensitive information held by the port.

My officials met with the Chief Executive and the Company Secretary of Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company on 11 April 2017 to progress matters, and a way forward was agreed. This was communicated to the Chief Executive of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council on 27 April 2017.

I understand that the port company is currently engaging with the Risk Assessor. When the risk assessment process is completed, I expect matters to progress towards agreeing a model and a date for transfer.

Ports Development

71. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the planned transfer of ownership of the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company to Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council; if this transfer will be option one or two in the Harbours Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30189/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Harbours Act 2015 provides the necessary legislative basis to allow for the transfer of Ports of Regional Significance, including the Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company, to local authority control. The future governance and operational structures of the port are primarily matters for agreement between the Council and the port company.

The decision on the model of transfer, option one or two outlined in the Harbours Act 2015, will be informed by both the due diligence report which was completed in January, and the risk assessment currently being carried out by the local authority.

I understand that the risk assessment process is still ongoing. This will enable the Council to fully understand the implications of models of transfer and the responsibility that will transfer in financial and other terms.

When the Risk Assessment process is completed, it is expected that matters will progress towards finalising the model and date of transfer.

Rail Services

72. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to parliamentary question number 71 of 22 March 2017, the status of the report on the consultation process on the current and future role of rail transport here; his plans to open an express train service from Wexford town to Dublin, in order to facilitate commuters and increase the number of passengers using the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30134/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) held a public consultation process to start a national debate on the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. The public consultation process was launched with the publication of a Rail Review 2016 report, which examined the funding required to support the heavy rail network now and into the future, together with a consultation document “The Role of Rail in Ireland and Funding its Delivery”. Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA is preparing a report of those submissions.

In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines or investment in the company and its relevant infrastructure.

As noted within the Rail Review Report, its analysis predates the finalisation of the National Planning Framework which is being developed at present under the leadership of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. It is obvious that, once agreed by Government, the approach which that Framework adopts toward land-use planning and settlement patterns for the country will have significant impacts on the potential of rail and other transport infrastructure and services into the future. I look forward to the finalisation and adoption by Government in the coming months of the new National Planning Framework, which I believe will form an important context for my consideration of issues raised by the Rail Review Report and any recommendations I will bring to Government.

In relation to the Deputy’s specific enquiry about the potential for an express service from Wexford town to Dublin, I have referred the question to the NTA for direct reply.

Rail Services

73. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the unfolding financial crisis Irish Rail; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30132/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that the taxpayer makes a significant and recurring contribution each year to Iarnród Éireann. This contribution takes the form of both current, PSO, funding and also capital funding under what is known as the IMMAC (infrastructure management multi-annual contract). In 2016 funding under both the PSO and IMMAC programmes cumulatively increased by 10% when compared with 2015, and Budget 2017 has further improved that funding position.

However, I recognise that there are issues for consideration in relation to how we fund our rail network and by extension Iarnród Éireann. In August 2015 my Department published the *Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport* which outlined the funding pressures

across both our rail and road networks and made a number of recommendations in respect of our key priorities and principles for future investment.

In relation to rail, the *Strategic Investment Framework* recommended the development of a new rail policy and last year the National Transport Authority and Iarnród Éireann published the *Rail Review Report 2016* on which the NTA held a public consultation.

Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA is preparing a report of those submissions.

In advance of that, no decisions have been taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines or investment in the company and its relevant infrastructure.

As noted within the *Rail Review Report*, its analysis predates the finalisation of the National Planning Framework which is being developed at present under the leadership of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. It is obvious that, once agreed by Government, the approach which that Framework adopts toward land-use planning and settlement patterns for the country will have significant impacts on the potential of rail and other transport infrastructure and services into the future. I look forward to the finalisation and adoption by Government in the coming months of the new National Planning Framework, which I believe will form an important context for my consideration of issues raised by the *Rail Review Report* and any recommendations I will bring to Government.

Military Aircraft Landings

74. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of US troops who have passed through Shannon Airport to date in 2017. [29941/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Shannon Airport has informed my Department that the number of US troops who have passed through Shannon Airport from 1 January 2017 to 31 May 2017 is 22,465.

June figures are not yet available.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

75. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the recent projections of the EPA that, rather than reducing, transport emissions are expected to increase by 10% to 12% between 2015 and 2020; in view of the fact that road transport accounts for 95% of total transport emissions here, his further views on whether Government transport policy heavily favours the road system and arguably has the knock-on effect of incentivising private car use over public transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30133/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Transport is a derived demand. Ireland's welcome return to strong employment growth in recent years coupled with expected population growth is significantly impacting upon travel demand. Despite some policy success in decoupling transport emissions from travel demand over the last decade, we recognise that the scale of increase in transport needs will likely negatively impact on the sectors emissions profile.

Under the leadership of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, who spearhead the process, my own Department is one of the key Departments - includ-

ing Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Housing, Planning and Local Government; Finance; and Public Expenditure and Reform - contributing to the development of the National Mitigation Plan which will be published soon. This cross-sectoral Plan will set out the challenges to meeting emission reductions targets for the entire economy and chart a clear and quantified path towards Ireland's long-term objective of transition to a low-carbon, and climate resilient economy by 2050. In relation to the transport sector, a wide range of measures are considered, with the focus on securing a shift to public transport in appropriate, particularly urban, areas, speeding up the expected transition to alternative fuels or technologies, and targeted behavioural change.

The continued development of public transport and active travel modes will be a key element in providing an effective and sustainable transport system for the future. My Department's commitment to reducing dependence on the private car in favour of more sustainable forms of travel where feasible is clearly demonstrated by funding important infrastructure and behavioural change programmes to promote visibility and uptake of alternative modes of transport. As the Deputy is aware, I have made and continue to make a strong case for public transport investment to be increased and accelerated to address our forecast growth in transport needs as part of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan.

We must equally ensure that the capacity of our transport system to respond to the challenge of reducing emissions is not undermined. Delivery and maintenance of high quality road infrastructure is crucial for the efficient transportation of all vehicles, not least buses, coaches and bicycles.

Transport policy is developed to best serve the needs of society and the economy through safe, sustainable and competitive transport networks and services. We are working hard to embed the imperative of securing cleaner, lower carbon transport emissions at the core of policy making.

Bus Éireann Services

76. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding establishing the multi-stakeholder forum to deal with future challenges faced by Bus Éireann which was promised in April 2017; the measures his Department is taking to secure the future of the company and its bus services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30173/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy is aware that I am committed to a dialogue with all public transport stakeholders in order to advance the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to start a review of public transport policy.

I believe that this broad dialogue will allow for all stakeholders, including trade unions, a chance to inform the development of public transport policy in Ireland. I look forward to that dialogue and the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Preparations are at an early stage and I am sure the Deputy can appreciate that there will a considerable level of organisation and scheduling required if we are to have the type of meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas that I think we all want.

In advance of this dialogue, I have invited representatives of all CIÉ trade unions, as well as ICTU, to meet with me and explain their issues of concern that have been expressed in recent months. Invitations issued last week and the meeting will take place in early July. I believe this

meeting will provide unions with an opportunity to voice their views to me directly in relation to any issues of policy concern they might have.

In relation to Bus Éireann specifically, the Deputy is aware that acceptance of the Labour Court's Recommendation provides the basis for the Company to now move forward with building a successful and sustainable future. Implementation of the proposals contained within the Recommendation is a matter for the Company and its employees.

In terms of its PSO services, the Deputy is aware that those services are improving and expanding and that the taxpayers' contribution to those services is similarly increasing due to the increases I secured in Budget 2017. I have committed to seeking further increases in PSO funding in this year's Budget subject, of course, to the overall resources available.

Aviation Industry Regulations

77. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress on the establishment of the IAA as the competent authority relating to airport noise under EU Directive 598/14; the level of consultation with community representatives; the extra staff recruited; and any other relevant decisions. [29945/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the establishment of the new Competent Authority is a top priority for my Department in order to give full effect in Irish Law to Regulation 598/2014. The new Statutory Instrument is currently being concluded by officials in my Department with detailed legal guidance from the Office of the Attorney General. It is, most certainly, a matter of urgency as I have repeatedly and publically indicated.

Regarding the issues the Deputy refers to, as I have previously stated, I have made a commitment that the Authority will meet with community representatives and that the meeting should take place as soon as the designation process is finalised. In relation to staff recruitment and other matters pertinent to this significant Regulation, again, it will fall to the Competent Authority to finalise the necessary arrangements, including recruitment, to enable it to carry out its functions under the Regulation.

Rail Network Expansion

78. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his Department's commitment to complete the Navan rail line. [29951/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my replies of the 8th February 2017 to Dáil Question number 50 and of the 22nd March 2017 to Dáil Question number 78. The position with regard to the Navan rail line remains as outlined in those responses.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

79. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he has had contact with the President of the United States of America. [29969/17]

Taoiseach (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I spoke with President Trump by phone yesterday afternoon. It was a short congratulatory call, similar to a number of calls I have had over recent days.

The President and I spoke about Brexit and its impact on Ireland as well as the Peace Process and efforts to reinstate power sharing in Northern Ireland. I acknowledged the importance of continued close interest and support from the US administration.

The president reiterated the invitation to me to attend the traditional functions in Washington for St. Patrick's Day and I look forward to attending these next March.

During our brief conversation I raised a number of issues including Ireland-US trade relations, the situation of the up to 50,000 undocumented Irish in the US and Climate Change, and I look forward to having an opportunity to discuss these issues with him in more detail in due course.

As I said in the house yesterday, I want to see our relations with the United States continue to develop based on the long-standing friendship that exists between our two countries. As Taoiseach, I am committed to working productively with the US Administration in the cause of international peace and security, to promote Ireland's interests in the United States and to further strengthen the economic, trade and investment links between Ireland and the US to the mutual benefit of both countries. At the same time I will ensure that I promote the values of this country and the European values that this Government stands for as well.

Ministerial Advisers Appointments

80. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the advisers he plans to appoint. [29970/17]

Taoiseach (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I am currently considering the advisory supports that I might need in my role as Taoiseach and Head of Government. While I have not as yet finalised the make-up of my team, I intend to recruit a number of Special Advisers, including a Chief of Staff. All such appointments will be, of course, subject to Government approval.

Departmental Agencies Data

81. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; and the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form. [30293/17]

Taoiseach (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the only relevant body insofar as my Department is concerned, is an advisory body and not required to have a tax clearance certificate.

Departmental Reviews

82. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the reason her Department's web page for making submissions to the consultation on the review of the Succeed in Ireland initiative was not available for a number of weeks; the reason no email address for submissions was included on the web page or in her Department's draft terms of reference; and the reason submissions have not been published on her Department's website. [30276/17]

83. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and

Innovation the number of submissions which were made to the public consultation on the Succeed in Ireland initiative; and when the review of the initiative will be completed. [30277/17]

84. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs secured by an organisation (details supplied) by company; the number of these jobs verified by the IDA to date; the dates these jobs were verified; and the number of jobs not verified. [30278/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 to 84, inclusive, together.

I understand from the IDA that a total of 2,831 jobs have been notified to the IDA in approved projects. Of these, 575 have been verified by the IDA with a further 5 awaiting verification. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I cannot give a company specific breakdown of these jobs. There are no jobs that have not been verified by the IDA at the end of their approval period.

As was announced previously, my Department will soon be commissioning an independent review of the Succeed-in-Ireland programme. That review, which will be carried out after details of the initiative's full and final costs are available, will equip us with a thorough understanding of the programme's results and its contribution to employment generation in the State.

Last month, my Department undertook a public consultation seeking views on the draft terms of reference for the review. The webpage setting out information on that public consultation process was easily accessible on the Department's website. It was not offline at any time during the consultation period. Contact details for the Department, including an email address and telephone number, were also available on that same webpage.

I am pleased that the consultation process elicited 17 different submissions. These are being examined by my Department and will help to shape the terms of reference for the review. The submissions will also be published once the terms of reference have been finalised.

Departmental Agencies Data

85. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if all agencies under her aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30289/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 4.1 of the Department of Finance circular 43/2006, which deals with tax clearance procedures in respect of public sector contracts, provides that contracts awarded and payments between public sectors bodies are excluded from tax clearance procedures.

In light of this, it is not strictly necessary for state agencies to obtain tax clearance certificates. Nevertheless the following agencies under the aegis of my Department have elected to obtain tax clearance certs:

- Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority
- Competition and Consumer Protection Commission
- Personal Injuries Assessment Board

- Enterprise Ireland
- National Standards Authority of Ireland
- Health and Safety Authority
- IDA Ireland

Science Foundation Ireland have not elected to obtain a tax clearance cert to date.

Employment Rights

86. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on seafarer pay; the investigations her officials are undertaking on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30439/17]

87. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on a recent circular (details supplied) that seafarers working in the Irish Sea are being paid £3.78 per hour; the investigations her officials are undertaking on this matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30440/17]

88. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on pay rates paid by key operators on the Irish Sea in which a company (details supplied) is paying seafarers £3.47 per hour; the invigilation of these rates and regulations which is taking place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30441/17]

89. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on pay rates paid by key operators on the Irish Sea in which a company (details supplied) is paying seafarers £5.55 per hour; the invigilation of these rates which is taking place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30442/17]

90. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on pay rates paid by key operators on the Irish Sea in which a company (details supplied) is paying seafarers £3.78 per hour; the invigilation of these rates and regulations which is taking place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30443/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 to 90, inclusive, together.

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 Inspection Services have the power to carry out employment rights compliance inspections in relation to the following legislation:

Organisation of Working Time Act 1997

Payment of Wages Act 1991

Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996

National Minimum Wage Act 2000

Parental Leave Acts 1998 and 2006

Redundancy Payments Acts 1967–2012

Employment Agency Act 1971

Industrial Relations Acts, 1946 to 2015

Carers Leave Act, 2001

Protection of Employment Act, 1977

Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Acts, 1984 to 1991

Employment Permits Act 2003 to 2006

Workplace Relations Act, 2015

The WRC will investigate the information provided by the Deputy. However it should be noted that as a general rule the flag state (i.e. the state where the ship is registered) has the exclusive right to exercise legislative and enforcement jurisdiction over its ships on the high seas. If these vessels are not Irish flagged, the enforcement of terms and conditions of employment are then a matter for the flag state in accordance with international maritime law and practice.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

91. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the approval process for employment and investment incentive, EII, applications is apparently backlogged by up to four months; if he will provide additional resources to address this matter in view of the fact that this is adversely impacting on businesses pitching to prospective investors and on their fundraising ability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30298/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Employment and Investment Incentive (“EII”) scheme, provided for in Part 16 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, is a tax incentive whereby individuals who invest in certain qualifying companies can qualify for tax relief on the amount invested.

A qualifying company is one which:

- is an unquoted SME, meaning it has less than 250 employees and has an annual turnover of up to €50 million or an annual balance sheet total of up to €43 million,

- when its first EII investment is raised, the company (including any companies under the control of the same people) has been trading for less than 7 years or, if the company has been trading for more than 7 years, the EII investment is required to develop a new product, or enter a new market, and the amount of the EII investment required is greater than 50% of the company's average annual turnover for the preceding 5 years,

- any second or subsequent follow-on EII investments must be foreseen in the business plan the company used to raise its first EII investment.

I am advised by Revenue that they are experiencing some backlog in processing requests for approval under this scheme. There has been an increase in the volume of correspondence on the scheme partially due to an increase in the number of companies applying for certification but also in relation to the increased complexity brought to the scheme by the changes made in

Finance Act 2015. The Finance Act 2015 changes were necessary to bring the scheme into line with conditions specified in the General Block Exemption Regulation (Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014 of 17 June 2014). The introduction of the 7 year age limit is one such condition, as is the requirement that the possibility of follow-on investment was foreseen in the company's original business plan.

Revenue further advise me that, as a facility to companies that are considering raising investments under the incentive and as an administrative measure, they provide what is known as "outline approval" to companies in advance of the shares issuing. This is where Revenue is prepared to express the opinion that a company would be regarded as a qualifying company once the conditions of qualification are met. There is no requirement for a company to obtain outline approval prior to issuing shares however, and the actual entitlement to the relief can only be determined after a company has raised its capital and issued shares. Therefore, until the company has actually issued shares to investors it is not possible for Revenue to determine whether or not relief under the EII scheme is due.

The current backlog on processing applications for EII outline approvals is 3 months, while the backlog on actual EII claims is about 2 months. I am informed by Revenue that procedures have been put in place to reduce these backlogs.

Insurance Industry Regulation

92. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will amend the insurance compensation fund legislation to allow the claimants at a company (details supplied) that are likely to be compensated soon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30254/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is my understanding, after seeking clarification, that the Deputy wishes to know if there is an intention to amend the Insurance Compensation Framework legislation (Insurance Act, 1964) to allow the claimants of Setanta to be compensated for 100% of the amounts due to them.

At the outset you should note that my Department has been advised by the Liquidator that as of 20 June 2017, the number of open claims was 1,578.

The Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice and the State Claims Agency are currently working with the Liquidator to progress the making of payments subject to the limits of 65% or €825,000 whichever is the lessor. There are currently 324 claims ready for settlement and I understand that these have been validated by the State Claims Agency. The process for bringing these claims to the High Court for approval has commenced but a date has yet to be agreed.

In relation to the 35% gap, 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 the full amount.

In this regard, 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.

Finally, the Deputy should note 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 any future motor insurance insolvencies. However, it does not provide for 100% compensation for Setanta policyholders.

Departmental Agencies Data

93. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30286/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I am advised that of the eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department, ten have an up to date tax clearance certificate. These bodies are the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General, Central Bank, Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau, Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, National Asset Management Agency, National Treasury Management Agency, Office of the Revenue Commissioners, Social Finance Foundation and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland.

Details of the remaining eight bodies are set out in the following table.

Agency/Body	
Credit Review Office	The Credit Review Office does not have a Tax Clearance Certificate because it does not invoice any public sector bodies/receive any public sector funding.
Credit Union Advisory Committee	CUAC consists of a committee of 3. It does not have a Tax Clearance Certificate as funding is allocated from Vote 7 (Department of Finance) from which annual fees and expenses of the Committee are paid.
Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo)	REBO is not liable for taxation, therefore it does not have a Tax Clearance Certificate.
Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal	The DDMBA does not have a tax number. It is an appeal board whose members are appointed by the Minister for Finance. It is facilitated by the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH) and paid for out of the Finance Vote. The NRH has an up to date Tax Clearance Certificate which covers the DDMBA.
Financial Services Ombudsman Council	A Tax Clearance Certificate is not required as the Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau deals with payments on behalf of the Financial Services Ombudsman Council.
Investor Compensation Company Limited	The ICCL has no requirement for a Tax Clearance Certificate at present. It is satisfied that all its tax affairs are in order with appropriate returns and payments made up to date.
Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal	IFSAT does not have a Tax Clearance Certificate. The Tribunal does not have any transactions that fall under the PAYE or VAT regime. It does not employ staff and it has no sales.
Tax Appeals Commission	The Commission is centrally funded by the Exchequer through Vote 10. As such, the Commission has no requirement or need for a Tax Clearance Certificate

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

94. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to carry out a full review of the disabled drivers and passengers scheme in view of the restrictive criteria of the scheme which in some cases bar persons with debilitating conditions such as MS, spina bifida and so on from availing of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30345/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax (up to a certain limit), an exemption from motor tax and a grant in respect of fuel, on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities.

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

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

The Scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise.

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

The disability criteria for the tax concessions available under the scheme have changed over time. When the scheme was first introduced in 1968, the legislation only allowed for one medical ground. In 1989, four new medical grounds were added and in 1994, one new medical ground was added.

I recognize the important role that the Scheme plays in expanding the mobility of citizens with disabilities. The relief has been maintained at current levels throughout the crisis despite the requirement for significant fiscal consolidation. From time to time representations are received from individuals who feel they would benefit from the Scheme but do not qualify under the six criteria. While I have sympathy for these cases, given the scale and scope of the Scheme, I have no plans to expand the medical criteria beyond the six currently provided for in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

Insurance Coverage

95. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the reason there is a limit cover on bicycle insurance if the bicycle was bought abroad. [30349/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am not in a position to outline the specific reasons why companies may require such a limit on bicycle insurance. As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

It should be noted that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. They do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices vary across the market and consumers are accordingly free to choose whatever product best meets their needs with price obviously being a relevant factor.

Finally, the other factor which is relevant to this matter is that insurance company's price in accordance with their own past claims experience, and this may be another reason why there is a limit on cover for bicycle insurance.

Mortgage Schemes

96. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of life loans in respect of residential properties in issuance here; the amount owed on these loans; if such loans are still being marketed by banks; if he is satisfied that the attention of the general public is being fully drawn to the risk associated with a life loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30368/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank has advised that, as part of its ongoing supervisory work, the Bank carried out some work in respect of 'Lifetime' loans in 2016. Based on information from lenders (which represented the majority of the market at a point in time in 2016), the Central Bank indicated that there were loans of approximately €640 million to approximately 5,000 customers outstanding.

If a regulated entity wishes to engage in the provision of lifetime mortgages, the Central Bank requires that transparency is provided to the borrower at the outset and borrowers must be treated in accordance with the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code). The Code provides that regulated entities must, where relevant, set out specified warnings regarding lifetime mortgages on its website, application forms or any other document provided to a consumer. The Code also requires that, prior to offering, recommending, arranging or providing a lifetime mortgage to a consumer, a regulated entity must inform the consumer of the consequences of purchasing a lifetime mortgage and provide information on;

- the circumstances in which the loan will have to be repaid
- details of the interest rate that will be charged
- an explanation of the impact of the rolling up of the interest over the duration of the loan
- an indication of the amount required to repay the loan at maturity

- the effect on the existing mortgage, if any; and

- an indication of the likely early redemption costs which would be incurred if the loan was redeemed on the third and fifth anniversary of the loan and at five yearly intervals thereafter.

The Code also provides that a regulated entity must ensure that the consumer is made aware of the importance of seeking independent legal advice regarding the proposed transaction.

After the provision of the lifetime mortgage, the Consumer Protection Code 2012 also requires regulated entities to, at least annually, provide a statement of account to the consumer borrower which includes information on the opening balance, all transactions, all interest charged, all charges, the outstanding balance and details of the interest rate(s) applied to the account during the period covered by the statement.

Central Bank of Ireland Investigations

97. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the action the Central Bank has taken after it asserted in correspondence to him that it had received false and misleading information in the context of its investigation into the motor insurance sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30391/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My understanding is that the Deputy is referring to correspondence, dated 18 August 2015, from the then Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, Patrick Honohan, to the then Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan TD, following a request under Section 6A of the Central Bank Act 1942.

I sought the views of the Central Bank on this matter and they have advised me that as part of the implementation of Solvency II, a condition of authorisation relating to this matter was applied to all firms. This condition states “The Firm shall not in any circumstances provide the Central Bank of Ireland with: (a) false or misleading statements concerning the operation of the Firm, or (b) information which it knows or ought reasonably to know to be false or misleading.” This condition is effective from 1 January 2016, the date of Solvency II coming into force. This condition is also applied to any new firms upon authorization.

The Central Bank has also indicated to me that it is limited by confidentiality provisions from discussing individual regulated firms or its investigations.

Ministerial Staff

98. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the supports afforded to the previous holder of his office; the cost of these supports per annum; the period of time for which these supports will be given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30460/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that under the current Department of Public Expenditure & Reform guidelines on Ministerial Appointments my predecessor was entitled to the following supports:

Permitted under DPER guidelines	Number of staff assigned to the Minister
Special Advisors – 2	2
Civilian Drivers – 2	2
Parliamentary Assistant – 1	1
Personal Secretary – 1	0
Ministers Private Office – 8	8
Ministers Constituency Office - 4	2
Total - 18	Total - 15

The total annual salary cost amounted to approx. €698,000.

The former Minister was also provided with IT support which ceased when he left Office.

All of these supports remained in place for the duration of Minister Noonan's period in Office as Minister for Finance.

National Monuments

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that adequate facilities exist regarding transport to and parking thereat in respect of various historical sites, locations and buildings throughout the country with a view to ensuring the maximisation of visits by tourists from home and abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30493/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works is responsible for the maintenance and management of over 800 National Monuments and Heritage properties in State care. Many of these locations are of considerable interest as tourism destinations and attract significant volumes of both domestic and foreign visitors annually. The provision of adequate car and coach parking facilities, and indeed visitor-facing infrastructure generally, to serve this tourism demand is therefore a priority at many locations.

Notwithstanding the need to provide these facilities for visitors, it is also clear that the provision in particular of carparking has to be treated with considerable caution having regard to the aesthetic and landscape sensitivity of historic sites, the potential presence in many cases of underground archaeology and the general risks to fabric involved in bringing large volumes of visitors into close proximity with sometimes fragile buildings. In certain cases, the provision of carparking within large formally designed historic landscapes can be at odds with the sensitive management of such locations and can only be located where they do not create an adverse visual impact. Equally, at certain small rural sites where visitor numbers are not significant, the correct approach will be that no adjacent parking, or at most a single layby, is the appropriate response.

No two sites are the same and each one poses unique challenges. Accordingly OPW approaches any proposals to provide new or extended carpark facilities with some caution having regard to the impact these developments bring, the needs of heritage protection and a sustainable approach. There are however clearly a number of instances where improved facilities are desirable and the OPW is in the process of addressing a number of these cases both with its own resources and as part of the partnership currently underway with Fáilte Ireland to address capital works development issues.

100. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30291/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the Public Appointments Service, the Office of Public Works, the State Laboratory, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Regulator of the National Lottery are all tax compliant. PAS and OPW have up to date tax clearance certificates. The State Laboratory supply their customers with their tax numbers and access codes and the customer uses this information to check tax compliance on the Revenue website as required in real time.

The Special EU Programmes Body is one of the North South bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement, and therefore comes under the jurisdiction of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and is subject to a Financial Memorandum agreed by the NSMC. Assurances on financial probity are provided by the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions as part of their joint audit on the annual report and accounts of these North/South Bodies.

The Institute of Public Administration and the Economic and Social Research Institute are not State bodies. However, as they receive funds from my Department, some aspects of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies apply to them. Both organisations are tax compliant and have current tax clearance certificates.

Public Procurement Contracts Data

101. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of tenders publicly advertised in County Tipperary in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by the Office of Government Procurement or on etendering.ted.europa.eu, which contained a call for suppliers (details supplied); the successful winners of such contracts; the number of SMEs that won such contracts; the number of micro size businesses that won such contracts; the steps being taken to ensure SMEs can access a greater share of publicly advertised tenders by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30370/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The management of the tendering process and the administration of the contract once awarded is a matter for each contracting authority. Public contract details, therefore, are held by the individual contracting authority concerned.

This public procurement process is facilitated through the national eProcurement portal www.etenders.gov.ie which is managed by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP).

The information requested by the Deputy will not be available within the time allowed. An analysis of the tender notices published on eTenders is required in order to identify the procurement categories and locations requested. The information will issue directly to the Deputy.

In relation to the steps being taken to ensure SMEs can access a greater share of publicly advertised tenders by the government. Public Procurement is governed by EU and National rules. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers the best value for money. It would be a breach of the EU rules for a public body to favour particular candidates on grounds such as organisation size, locality, nationality etc., and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

However, there is a recognition at EU Level of the need to promote and facilitate SME participation in public procurement. The new EU Directives on Procurement, transposed into Irish law in May 2016, are intended to make it easier for businesses and SMEs to tender for public sector procurement contracts. Measures specifically designed to improve access for SMEs and start-ups include:

- financial capacity criterion is generally limited to twice contract value - there are no centrally imposed requirements for a minimum turnover. Establishing the appropriate suitability criteria that are relevant and appropriate to a particular contract is, of course, a matter for the contracting authority concerned. This is because the contracting authority is in the best position to gauge the appropriate levels of financial capacity that are appropriate to the needs of that specific contract.

- discretion to divide public contracts into lots, with the proviso that opting not to divide a contract into lots must be explained in the procurement documents or the report on the procurement process.

- electronic methods of communication are mandated in parts of the tender process.

- the introduction of the European Single Procurement Document (ESPD), a self-declaration form aimed at reducing red tape for suppliers

- provision for “consortia bidding” may assist SMEs to participate in procurement procedures where they would not have the relevant capability or scale if they were to bid as sole tenderers

- explicit provision for pre-market discussion with suppliers and independent experts, subject to safeguards against distorting competition or violating transparency and non-discrimination principles

- reductions in the time limits for receipt of tenders by approximately 30% compared to the position under the 2006 Regulations

- Member States are required to report back to the Commission every 3 years on SME participation in public procurement

A number of these measures had been accelerated into policy in 2014 in advance of the transposition of the new Directives by Circular 10/14 - Initiatives to assist SMEs in Public Procurement - issued by the OGP.

The reform of public procurement across the public service is on-going and will continue to provide opportunities to the SME sector to win business. The OGP works with industry to ensure that winning government business is done in a fair, transparent and accessible way and to ensure that government procurement policies are business friendly. It does this by facilitating quarterly meetings of an SME Advisory Group, which have been chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for public procurement, so that the voice of Irish SMEs (including ISME, IBEC, SFA, Chambers Ireland, and CIF) can be heard by Government. SMEs are also encouraged to register with the Government’s eTenders portal so that they can be notified of upcoming tendering opportunities.

The OGP works with the SME industry representative bodies as well as the Department of Enterprise and Innovation, InterTrade Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to promote the engagement of SMEs in public procurement. Evidence of the work and co-operation in the area can be seen in events such as “Go-2-Tender” workshops and “Meet the Buyer” events.

The data analysed by the OGP and published last September (2014 Public Service Spend and Tendering Analysis Report) indicates that 95% of the State's expenditure is with firms within the State and the majority of spend analysed is with SMEs.

The OGP will continue to proactively engage with business and strive to enhance the significant measures already in place to support SME access to public procurement opportunities.

Public Sector Pay

102. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will set out each side agreement reached with trade unions and staff associations during the recent talks that led to the draft public service agreement including for additional allowances, annual leave and higher pay rates; and if he will set out also the cost of each individual item, in tabular form. [30478/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department has published details of this matter on its website: <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/public-service-pay-policy/public-service-stability-agreement/>

Please find, in addition, the following table outlining the costs for those measures on which agreement was reached in the course of the recent negotiations and which will only fall to be payable should the Agreement be ratified later this year.

Measure	Cost per annum
The consequential increase of €500 in the rate of Rent Allowance and associated salary scale consolidations for Prison Officers and Firefighters on foot of the Labour Court recommendations on An Garda Síochána.	€6.5m
Extension of the Rent Allowance to those small number of full-time Firefighters not already in receipt of it.	€0.25m
Restoration for post-2012 new entrants of allowance for radiographers working in the Breast Check Unit in the health sector;	€0.27m
Restoration for post-2012 new entrants of Livestock Allowance for certain technical officers in the Department of Agriculture; and	€0.09m
Restoration for post-2012 new entrants of Tool Allowance for craft workers in the Local Authorities, OPW, and health and education sectors.	€0.39m

Separately, as highlighted in the published list on the website, agreement was reached at the WRC prior to the recent negotiations on 4 March this year under the framework of the existing Lansdowne Road Agreement that a number of allowances for post-2012 new entrant nurses would be restored. The annual costs associated with this element of the March nursing agreement are €4.71 million. Their restoration is also conditional on ratification of the new Agreement by the unions concerned.

Brexit Issues

103. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the possible affect of Brexit on fees and access to higher education for Irish students who attend British universities and colleges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30365/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under existing rules, all

EU higher education students are treated the same as a national from the country in which they seek to study. Depending upon the negotiated terms of Brexit there may be future implications for Irish students studying in the UK. My Department is keeping this matter under constant review and it is my stated intention to seek to have the best outcome for our students.

A principal concern of mine is to protect to the greatest extent possible student mobility between Ireland and Northern Ireland, the UK and within the EU and to support our strategy to increase non-EU student flows. I am particularly concerned to facilitate the continued feasibility of the UK as an option for our further and higher education students.

With such issues in mind a key part of my approach has been to engage on Brexit-related matters at political and institutional level. I have met my counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and recently met with the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. I also met the former Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Keir Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. I have also had meetings with Ministers from other EU Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission at which our priorities and concerns were raised.

In relation to Irish students currently studying in Higher Education Institutions in the UK and those planning to do so in the coming years, the UK Government have outlined that the EU referendum outcome and the triggering of Article 50 will not lead to any immediate change to the immigration status of current EU students, including those that are on courses in this academic year (2016–17).

It has also been outlined in separate statements from across all UK nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) that current university students from the EU and those applying to courses starting in 2017–18 will not see any changes to their loan eligibility or tuition fee status. This position will apply for the full duration of the course, even if the course finishes after the UK has left the EU. For students looking to study in Scotland, this position has been extended to those enrolling for 2018–19.

Separate statements from across all UK nations confirm that current EU students, including 2016–17 entrants, will remain eligible to receive loans and grants to fund their studies for the duration of their courses.

EU students attending universities in England and Wales who are eligible under current rules to receive loans and grants from the Student Loans Company will continue to do so for the duration of courses they are currently enrolled on. This has been confirmed by the Student Loans Company for England, and by Universities Wales for Wales.

Under EU law, students from EU member states applying for undergraduate degrees at Scottish universities are currently eligible for free tuition. For EU students attending a university in Scotland, the Scottish government and Universities Scotland have confirmed that there has been no change in current funding arrangements. This means that eligible EU students already studying in Scotland, including those that commenced their studies the current academic year (2016–17) will continue to benefit from free tuition and, for those who meet the residency requirement, associated living cost support.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy has issued a statement confirming that EU nationals who are currently receiving student loans from Student Finance Northern Ireland, including those that started courses last autumn (in the 2016–17 academic year) will continue to receive these loans and grants until they finish their course.

The following is the position for EU students applying for a course starting in 2017–18:

- In England: The Government has outlined that EU students applying to start a course in England in 2017–18 will continue to be eligible for tuition fee loans and for ‘home’ fee status for the duration of their study.

- In Wales: The Education Secretary has announced that EU nationals who intend to begin studying in the academic year 2017–18 will also continue to receive financial support.

- It has also been confirmed in a statement from the Scottish Government that students starting courses in 2017 at universities in Scotland will continue to receive free tuition and other support for the full duration of their course.

- Similar announcements have been made in respect of EU students applying to universities in Northern Ireland. Student Finance Northern Ireland has said that EU nationals currently in higher education and those who intend to begin studying from 2017 who are assessed as eligible to receive loans and/or grants, will continue to receive these until they finish their course.

EU students applying for a PhD starting in 2017-18:

It has been confirmed by the UK Government that EU nationals starting courses in the next academic year (2017-18) will continue to be eligible for Research Council PhD studentships to help fund their studies for the full duration of their course. This will be the case even if the course finishes after the UK has left the European Union.

The foregoing is the most up-to-date information available to my Department in relation to the implications of Brexit on EU Students (including Irish students) currently studying or wishing to study in Higher Education Institutions in the UK in the coming years.

However, to ensure the utmost clarity for each individual student, I would advise all prospective Irish and other EU students to contact the higher education institution they are planning to apply to, or which they are already attending, in order to absolutely confirm its policy with regard to fees and tuition support for 2017-2018 and into the future.

My Department, as with all Government Departments, is continuing to engage with these matters and to plan for scenarios that might arise out of the EU-UK Brexit discussions. We will continue to contribute to the EU preparations for negotiations and to assist with those negotiations to the greatest extent possible. This includes engaging on education-related aspects of the Common Travel Area between Ireland and the UK and the issues identified in the EU Guidelines recently published that set out the priorities for the negotiations for the EU.

Teaching Contracts

104. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the employment legislation and standards that apply to teachers; the employment legislation and standards that apply to teachers of English as a foreign language; the differences between the employment legislation and standards that apply to these two separate groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30428/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012) it is the Board of Management or Education and Training Board, as appropriate, which is responsible for employment of school staff in accordance with procedures published by the Department following consultation with

the education partners.

These procedures are published on my Department's website normally following consultations under the auspices of Teachers Conciliation Council.

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

Regarding the teaching of English as a foreign language my Department may allocate extra teaching resources to schools that have high concentrations of pupils that require English as an Additional Language support. These teachers are employed by schools under the same terms and conditions.

The terms and conditions of individuals who are privately employed by non-recognised institutions is a matter for their employers.

Site Acquisitions

105. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30248/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department issued comments to the Board of Management on 7th February and has requested confirmation from the Board that the new school site has been finalized between the Patron body and the land owner. My Department has recently been in contact with the BOM who has advised that the site agreement is nearing completion, the BOM, as client cannot provide a definitive date as to when the process will be complete.

Upon receipt of this confirmation my Department will then revert to the Board of Management with regard to further progression of the project.

Schools Building Regulations

106. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a material (details supplied) has been used in school builds or school developments in the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30255/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): While the material referred to by the Deputy may be a component in some standard building products, particularly in insulation products, the Department can confirm that the type of cladding to which he also refers has not been used in school builds or school developments in the past two years.

Departmental Agencies Data

107. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an

up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30284/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My officials are in the process of collating the data sought by the Deputy and will respond to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

108. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will prioritise the availability of school supports for primary school students with severe dyslexia; if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30301/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs, including pupils with Specific Learning Disability (SLD); of which Dyslexia is one such SLD, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is a separate statutory agency, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for the provision of special educational needs supports to schools. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. SENOs are available to assist parents in identifying appropriate educational placements for children with special educational needs, including pupils with SLDs.

All Primary schools have been allocated additional teaching resources to cater for children with special educational needs, including pupils with dyslexia. Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers have been published on my Department's website, at <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Special-Education/Guidelines-for-Primary-Schools-Supporting-Pupils-with-Special-Educational-Needs-in-Mainstream-Schools.pdf>. Schools are supported in this regard by the National Educational Psychological Services.

It is a matter for schools to monitor and utilise their allocation of additional teaching support to best support the needs of identified pupils, in accordance with my Department's guidance. The teaching time afforded to each individual pupil is decided and managed by schools, taking into account each child's individual learning needs.

My Department also provides for special schools and special class placements where more intensive and supportive interventions are provided. Special classes attached to mainstream primary schools also support the needs of pupils with dyslexia. Such classes have a reduced pupil/teacher ratio of 9:1 and an increased level of capitation grant. The pupils who attend these classes have, following psychological assessment, been identified as having a specific learning disability. The NCSE continues to monitor and review the requirement for special class places in particular areas.

Funding is available to schools for the purchase of specialised equipment such as computers and/or software to assist children with special educational needs, including children with SLDs, where relevant professionals recommend the equipment as being essential for the provision of education. Schools apply to the NCSE, through their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) for such support. SENOs make recommendations to my Department where assis-

tive technology is required, in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0010/2013. All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO.

Further supports which are provided to support pupils with Dyslexia include an information resource pack on Dyslexia which has been made available to all primary and post-primary schools, as well as provision for continuing professional development for teachers with additional training needs in the area of Dyslexia through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and reasonable accommodations in State Examinations.

My Department also provides funding to the Dyslexia Association of Ireland at national level which helps the organisation operate an information service for members and the public as well as assisting in meeting the costs associated with the attendance of some children from disadvantaged backgrounds at workshops and programmes organised by the association.

My Department encourages parents and school authorities to engage locally regarding pupils' education. Should a parent be dissatisfied with the manner in which supports have been provided to support their child's education they should raise this matter directly with their school Principal or the Board of Management of the school. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's present or future educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Protected Disclosures

109. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his expectations and those of the HEA regarding board members and audit committees handling whistleblowers' cases in institutes of technology and universities. [30313/17]

110. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a board of an institute of technology or university was not told about a whistleblower's case, the sanction for the executive or the persons of the college. [30314/17]

111. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the sanctions in place for board members and audit committees of institutes of technology and universities that fail in their duty of care to whistleblowers; the date on which the attention of boards and-or the audit committee was drawn to whistleblowers in these colleges. [30315/17]

112. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that in some cases board members and audit committee members are also CEOs of ETBs and are responsible for handling their own ETB whistleblowers and are failing to deal with these matters; if this has occurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30316/17]

113. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there have been cases in which the HEA and-or his Department have taken action to date in 2017 against a whistleblower in such cases; and if his Department and the HEA are willing to intervene and remove members of a board for failure to act and protect a whistleblower. [30317/17]

114. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the HEA and his Department, by failing to have proper measures in place, are causing risk and reputational damage to colleges and persons; and if his attention has been further drawn to the costs associated with same. [30318/17]

116. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his De-

partment or the HEA has an oversight role regarding persons who manage whistleblowers in institutes of technology and universities, in view of the fact that they may have also been board members of long standing in ETBs and have failed to manage whistleblowers there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30320/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 109 to 114, inclusive, and 116 together.

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014, which came into effect on 15 July 2014, allows for any employee of a higher education institution (HEI) to make a disclosure to the Chief Executive Officer of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on any matter relating to the funding, planning and development of higher education and research in the State. The Act provides a framework within which employees of HEIs can raise concerns regarding potential wrongdoing in the workplace that has come to their attention and provides appropriate protections if they are penalised by their employer or suffer any detriment for doing so.

The HEA has a process in place for receiving these disclosures and takes appropriate action on any governance issues identified via this process with regard to an HEI. In the event that the HEA is not satisfied by a response received from a HEI which is the subject of a protected disclosure, it can consider recommending to my Department the appointment of an Inspector (in the case of IoTs) or a Visitor (in the case of Universities).

In addition, to complement the existing power to appoint a Visitor in the University sector, I will be seeking Government approval for a new power for the Minister for Education and Skills to appoint an investigator into a University in certain circumstances.

Issues raised by means of Protected Disclosures are taken very seriously by my Department and the HEA.

Higher Education Institutions

115. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of his Department's 2015 review of corporate governance in all colleges. [30319/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department and the HEA have been working closely together in recent years to strengthen governance arrangements in the higher education sector.

A key result of this shared commitment to underpin governance arrangements in the sector is the new Governance Framework for the Higher Education System, which was agreed in 2015 following consultation with my Department, the higher education institutions and other key stakeholders.

This Framework complements the previous governance and accountability infrastructure with a series of new and improved mechanisms which will provide more robust assurance of compliance with legislative and other requirements and more timely and responsive interventions to address any issues arising.

The framework makes clear the current governance arrangements that are in place and clearly details the responsibilities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in this area, as well as the central oversight role of the HEA in monitoring governance practice across the system and the mechanisms in place to ensure good governance practice and accountability of State funding.

The HEA have also established a new programme of rolling reviews to cover specific elements of governance. My Department agreed with the HEA that the first rolling review of governance compliance would be on procurement. This review was undertaken in 2016.

This comes on top of existing requirements, which include a requirement that all HEIs submit Annual Accounts, an Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Internal Control to the HEA and that each HEI signs a financial memorandum with the HEA each year that outlines the ongoing responsibilities of the institution in relation to financial reporting.

The Department of Education and Skills and the HEA are considering whether any additional measures may be necessary to further strengthen governance in the future.

Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 109.

Protected Disclosures

117. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if senior staff in a college (details supplied) have been proven to have been negligent in their duty of care in protecting a whistleblower or have been proven to be involved in penalising a member of staff of a university or institute of technology under section 12(1) of the Disclosure Act 2014; the sanction for these persons in respect of their jobs; the person or body that enforces the sanctions; if these persons pay for their own legal advisers or if the college pays for legal advice on their behalf; if persons have been held to account for same in an educational organisation; the sanction if a senior official of his Department or the HEA knew or ignored serious matters regarding whistleblowers; and if he will intervene in such matters. [30321/17]

118. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for delays in dealing with serious cases of whistleblowing within colleges; the further reason colleges are not proactive in such cases; if his attention has been drawn to the costs involved and the failure to look after the physical and mental health of persons; his plans to help and reward persons who have stood up to wrongdoing in educational organisations in view of the fact that whistleblowers are not protected by his Department with regard to their future careers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30322/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117 and 118 together.

The Deputy has not named the Institute in question so I can provide only limited information.

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014, which came into effect on 15 July 2014, allows for any employee of a higher education institution (HEI) to make a disclosure to the Chief Executive Officer of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on any matter relating to the funding, planning and development of higher education and research in the State. The Act provides a framework within which employees of HEIs can raise concerns regarding potential wrongdoing in the workplace that has come to their attention and provides appropriate protections if they are penalised by their employer or suffer any detriment for doing so.

The HEA has a process in place for receiving these disclosures and takes appropriate action on any governance issues identified via this process with regard to an HEI. In the event that the HEA is not satisfied by a response received from a HEI which is the subject of a protected disclosure, it can consider recommending to my Department the appointment of an Inspector (in the case of IoTs) or a Visitor (in the case of Universities).

In addition, to complement the existing power to appoint a Visitor in the University sector, I will be seeking Government approval for a new power for the Minister for Education and Skills to appoint an investigator into a University in certain circumstances.

Issues raised by means of Protected Disclosures are taken very seriously by my Department and the HEA.

Protected Disclosures

119. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if whistleblowers who are on sick or stress related leave are paid in full; if not, the reason for same; if educational organisations contact whistleblowers on leave to ascertain their state of health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30323/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The conditions governing the payment of salary for Civil Servants while on sick leave are contained in circular 12/2015. Section 3.9 of the circular provides an avenue for a staff member to avail of the Civil Service Employment Assistance Service for the overall wellbeing of the staff member. Section 3.11 provides a mechanism for a member of staff to apply to extend the period of paid sick leave under the Critical Illness Protocol.

The full terms of the circular can be viewed on the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform's Website.

Under the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012) it is the Board of Management or Education and Training Board, as appropriate, which is responsible for employment of school staff in accordance with procedures published by the Department following consultation with the education partners.

Following a review of sick leave arrangements, a new Public Service wide sick leave scheme was introduced across the Public Service in 2014. The Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) (Amendment) Act 2013, provided the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform with the power to make regulations that set out the specific details of the Public Service Sick Leave Scheme. These regulations are contained in SI 124 of 2014 and provides for employers to grant the following:

- A maximum of 3 months (92 days) on full pay in a year
- Followed by a maximum of 3 months (91 days) on half pay
- Subject to a maximum of 6 months (183 days) paid sick leave in a rolling four year period.

A person who becomes incapacitated as a result of a critical illness or serious physical injury may be granted extended paid sick leave, in exceptional circumstances of:

- A maximum of 6 months (183 days) on full pay in a year
- Followed by a maximum of 6 months (182 days) on half pay
- Subject to a maximum of 12 months (365 days) paid sick leave in a rolling four year period.

Details of teachers' sick leave entitlements are set out in the electronic book "Employment Terms and Conditions for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary and Post Primary

Schools” and in Circular 0054/2015 for Special Needs Assistants. These documents are available on my Department’s website.

The notification and recording of sick leave is a matter between the employer and employee and it operates regardless as to whether the staff member is a “Whistleblower” as referred to by the Deputy in her question. There is no provision for “whistleblowers” to be treated differently to other employees. In the event the Deputy has a concern about a particular case she can bring such a matter to my attention and I can request officials at my Department to examine the matter further.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

120. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will reassess the case of a person (details supplied) who has been refused a SUSI grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30337/17]

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.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted by the applicant via www.studentgrantappeals.ie outlining the position to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Student Assistance Fund

121. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to begin a phased restoration to 2012 rates of student assistance fund, SAF, to reflect the real costs attached to participation in higher level education here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30344/17]

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding phased restoration of SAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30418/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 and 132 together.

In December 2012 An additional €3 million was approved to supplement the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) following a survey conducted by the HEA in relation to the demand for the Fund.

This supplementary funding was a once-off exceptional measure which was taken in the context of long grant delays/issues encountered by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) in its initial year of operation.

An additional allocation of €1.5m was secured in budget 2016 for the Student Assistance Fund. The allocation under the Fund in 2017 is €8.1 million.

Public Relations Contracts Data

122. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a college has ever hired public relations firms with regard to whistleblowers in colleges; if so, the amount spent on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30347/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding as a block grant to the institutions. As autonomous bodies, the internal disbursement of this funding, along with any funding it receives from private sources, is a matter for individual institutions and my Department has no role in their day to day operational affairs including the tendering of goods and services it requires. However, higher education institutions are bound by public procurement procedures in relation to such expenditure.

Protected Disclosures

123. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a budget for a whistleblower to defend their good name in view of the fact that they stood up to protect the college reputation and finances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30348/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 provides a framework within which employees can raise concerns regarding potential wrongdoing that has come to their attention in the knowledge that they can avail of appropriate protections if they are penalised by their employer or suffer any detriment for doing so.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

124. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that primary school classes have on average four to five more pupils than those across the EU; his plans to reduce class sizes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30385/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools in the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the coming school year. The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in

teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

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

Average class size and the ratio of teachers to students (PTR) are two important measures of the resources that we make available to schools. Our average class size at primary level is only slightly above the EU average in relation to the pupil teacher ratio.

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

Capitation Grants

125. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase the capitation grant for primary schools by €20 per pupil, which according to research carried out by an organisation (details supplied) would cost €11.6 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30386/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is aware of the research referred to by the Deputy.

I do recognise the need to improve capitation funding for primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

The Action Plan for Education outlines hundreds of actions to be implemented over the 3 year period 2016 to 2019 which include restoring capitation funding as resources permit.

Budget 2017 represents the start of a major programme of reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade.

In relation to capitation funding this commitment remains a priority for me to address during the lifetime of the Action Plan.

Primary schools are permitted to regard the capitation and ancillary grant as a combined grant. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016 and €5 in 2017 in order to enable primary schools implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation. A similar type approach in relation to improvements in grant funding was applied, as appropriate, at post-primary level.

DEIS Administration

126. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will restore support services for DEIS schools; the measures in place to ensure a maximum class size of 15:1 in DEIS band 1 junior classes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30387/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As noted in DEIS Plan

2017 – Supports to schools participating in the School Support Programme come in many forms – additional financial assistance, enhanced grant payments, additional teaching resources, psychological and behavioural supports, access to Home School Community Liaison and School programmes and priority access to School Meals Schemes. The objective of these supports is to improve teaching and learning outcomes in DEIS schools so that children and young people at greatest risk of educational disadvantage can access, participate and benefit from education.

All of these supports have been available to eligible schools to date and continue to be provided under DEIS Plan 2017. There have been no reduction in support services offered to DEIS school.

In particular, the staffing schedule for DEIS schools continues to provide for class sizes in DEIS Band 1 urban primary schools of 20 to 1 in junior classes and 24 to 1 in senior classes. There is no proposal to change this position at this point in time.

In cases where schools have additional teaching resources at their disposal, these additional resources should be deployed to meet the objectives of the DEIS Programme as set out in the School Plan.

As part of an overall goal of ensuring that additional resources are correctly matched to need, there is provision in DEIS Plan 2017 for an evaluation of teaching resources for schools participating in DEIS to be undertaken to inform future policy in the Irish context. This evaluation is scheduled to take place in 2018 as part of the overall DEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and will involve relevant education partners and other stakeholders.

Teachers' Panel Rights

127. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore supply panels of teachers at primary level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30388/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A value for money review of the Supply Teacher Scheme was published in July 2006. The review found that only approx. 60% of supply teachers' time was used to cover sick leave absences. This reflects the unpredictable nature of sick leave absences. While there are benefits for schools in having these teachers it is considered more cost effective to use the normal substitution arrangements that apply to all other schools to cover sick leave absences instead of having a cohort of full-time teachers 'on call' all the time in these schools to cover sick leave absences that may or may not arise.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

128. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if SNA hours will be restored to 2017 allocation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if SNA hours for another person transferring to this school will be allocated to ensure that the school can maintain its SNA. [30394/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided to assist recognised schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to

participate in education.

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

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

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools, as a school based resource. The level of SNA support allocated to schools can change from year to year, as students with care needs leave the school, as new students with care needs enrol, or as students develop more independent living skills as they get older and their care needs diminish over time.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year by 6th April 2017. The NCSE continues to process applications for access to SNA support which are received after the April deadline. Such applications will be processed in the order in which the applications are received. Schools will be advised shortly of their SNA allocations for the 2017/18 school year.

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

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

English Language Training Organisations

129. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has met with representatives of a group (details supplied) who have requested to meet with him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30402/17]

130. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the working conditions of English language teachers do not fall under his Department's remit; if so, the reason therefor; the Department under which responsibility for these issues would lie; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30403/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 and 130 together.

The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract, and issues relating to working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department. If teachers working in the English language sector have a concern about their terms and conditions of employment they should contact the Workplace Relations Commission which offers a range of services to employees, including mediation, adjudication and inspection. This has previously been communicated to the group referred to by the

Deputy by my Department.

The regulations governing ACELS (Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services), which is operated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) on a voluntary basis, and the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), which is administered by the Department of Justice and Equality in association with my Department, specify a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers.

Going forward, Government policy for the international education sector is the International Education Mark (IEM), which will be managed by QQI. Legislative amendments are necessary to facilitate the introduction of the IEM. These amendments are contained in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. The General Scheme of the Bill was approved by Government at the Cabinet meeting on 9th May 2017 and has now been referred to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny. It is the intention that the regulations governing the IEM will include a requirement that all obligations concerning national employment legislation are complied with by education and training providers seeking to access the Mark. The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill will also provide QQI with powers to examine the bona fides of a provider in the round, including English language providers seeking to access the IEM.

Student Support Schemes

131. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding mental health counselling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30416/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding as a block grant to the institutions. As autonomous bodies, the internal disbursement of this funding, along with any funding it receives from private sources, is a matter for the individual institution.

My Department also provides a range of services for students in HEA funded higher education institutions, including supports provided by Access Offices. In particular these offices coordinate pastoral and academic supports for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Among the supports administered by the access offices, in conjunction with student services is the Student Assistance Fund.

The Student Assistance Fund is managed by the HEA on behalf of my Department. The Fund is allocated annually to the universities, the institutes of technology, the colleges of education and a number of other higher education institutions. The objective of the Fund is to provide financial assistance to full-time undergraduate or postgraduate students in need of such support. The Fund is intended to support students whose participation in higher education would otherwise be at risk as a direct result of financial difficulties.

The Fund is designed to support students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with on-going needs for financial support and students with other circumstances giving rise to short or longer-term financial difficulties, including family responsibilities, bereavement, family difficulties, accidents or health problems. In all cases, institutions are responsible for targeting the available resources at those students most in need.

Student services and associated activities are an integral part of the whole student experi-

ence at third level. Student services support each individual student achieve his/her intellectual, cultural and social potential while supporting and complementing the formal academic programme. Student services can fall under a number of headings, particularly 'Welfare and Guidance' which includes counselling services, health promotion, careers service, multi-faith, racial and ethnic cultural support.

AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

The HEA supports AHEAD with an annual grant towards the cost of the activities of the organisation. In 2016, AHEAD, in partnership with the National Learning Network (NLN), published a report called 'Mental Health Matters'. This report is a study into the experiences of students with mental health difficulties in higher education in Ireland and a mapping of best practices in supporting these students. The report found that the majority of HEIs have services supporting students with mental health difficulties and some institutions have dedicated services for students. It also found that students were generally positive about their experience of these services. Some key recommendations from the report were:

- A whole of campus strategic response is required to meet the needs of students with mental health difficulties.

- The promotion of mental health awareness should be as part of induction for students.

- The provision of mental health awareness training at an institutional level for academic and all other staff including part-time/adjunct staff.

- A move towards a flexible approach to teaching across programmes to bring greater flexibility to learning and assessment to improve access for all students.

Implementation of recommendations is being progressed by AHEAD and partners and a follow-on conference/seminar is planned for later this year.

Fund for Students with Disabilities

The Fund for Students with Disabilities allocates funding to further and higher education colleges for the provision of services and supports to full-time students with disabilities from PLC up to doctoral level. The Fund aims to ensure that students can participate fully in their academic programmes and are not disadvantaged by reason of a disability. It also supports students from Ireland to study on approved courses in Northern Ireland, the UK and other EU countries.

The total allocated under the FSD in 2015-16 was €10.4m. There were a total of 10,486 students supported under the fund.

Beneficiaries of the Fund for 2015-16 with a mental health condition were as follows:

- 91 out of 1362 total students in Further Education and

- 956 out of a total of 8920 students in Higher Education.

Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 121.

133. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding postgraduate grants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30419/17]

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

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

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

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

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

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding adjacency rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30420/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that Budget 2011 provided for a number of student grant measures which came into effect for the 2011/12 academic year, including the change in the assessment of the qualifying distance criterion for the non-adjacent rate of grant from 24 kilometres to 45 kilometres.

The 24km distance criterion was originally set in 1968 and had not been updated in more than 40 years. Since then, significant improvements have taken place in the road and rail network and it is considered that the revised distance criteria is more consistent with the type of distances that students may legitimately be expected to commute to college.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via www.studentgrantappeals.ie

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

135. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the SUSI grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30421/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 2017 scheme and regulations were published in late March. The 2017 scheme includes an amendment to the income threshold for the special rate of grant which has increased from €22,703 to €23,000. This change reflects the recent budget increases to the Old Age Contributory Pension and ensures that qualifying families dependent on welfare, will continue to qualify for the highest grant support possible.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for different levels of income thresholds where families have (i) less than 4 dependent children (ii) between 4 and 7 dependent children and (iii) 8 or more dependent children. In 2017, the highest income threshold for a family of less than 4 dependent children, is €54,240. In addition to this and in recognition of the additional cost to families where more than one person is attending college, income thresholds may be increased by a further €4,980 for each additional family member attending college at the same time.

The income thresholds and rates of maintenance grant under the Student Grant Scheme are announced annually as part of the Budget process. No changes to the rates or thresholds were included in Budget 2017. However, in line with the Programme for Government commitment, provision was made to reintroduce maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students.

Student Support Schemes

136. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding student support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30422/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19 contains more than 30 actions that are intended to make higher education more representative of wider society. One of five goals in the plan is to assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access in Higher Education Institutions. These include the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), both of which are managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of my Department.

Reviews of the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities were commissioned by the HEA. The Review of the Student Assistance Fund was published in September 2016. The recommendations in the Review are being implemented by the HEA in consultation with the DES. A Steering Group has been set up to support this process. The review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities is due to be published shortly.

The potential for reviewing options for existing access funding initiatives to part-time studies in higher education could only be considered in the context of the overall priorities and financial resources for access to higher education, and in the wider higher education funding context.

An additional €8.5million was announced in Budget 2017 for access measures to promote participation by under-represented groups in higher education.

- Measures to encourage HEIs to engage directly with disadvantaged communities in order

to attract more disadvantaged students (€2.5)

- Reinstatement of maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students (€4m)

- Measures to facilitate more lone parents to access higher education (€1m)

- A new 1916 bursary scheme (€1m)

Post graduate grants have been re-introduced in the Student Grant Scheme for the 2017/18 academic year for the most disadvantaged students.

Both the Fund for Students with Disabilities and Student grants are available to students attending full-time post-leaving certificate courses in the Further Education Sector. There are no plans to extend the Student Assistance fund to the Further Education sector.

Apprenticeship Programmes

137. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding student fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30423/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Since 2004, FÁS/SOLAS paid a part of the Annual Student Contribution (ASC) due in respect of apprentices, with apprentices themselves paying the part of the contribution relating to examination fees. As part of Budget 2014, SOLAS have ceased making payments to Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and apprentices pay the full pro rata Annual Student Contribution. These arrangements mean that apprentices are treated the same, on a pro rata basis for the proportion of a full academic year they spend in IoTs, as full time students in terms of the annual student contribution. Typically an apprenticeship block is one third of an academic year, meaning that most apprentices pay €1,000 (one third of the full ASC of €3,000) as their ASC for that period.

However, unlike full time students, apprentices are paid a training allowance by SOLAS for phases of their training spent in IoTs. This allowance ranges from €293 to €647 per week depending on the trade and phase of the apprenticeship programme. This is the equivalent to their net take-home pay on the job, and is not subject to tax or PRSI. Such allowances are not available to students in the IoTs.

Third Level Costs

138. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a grant for mandatory Gaeltacht courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30424/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The decision to stop the Gaeltacht placement grants was taken during the economic crisis when, unfortunately, very difficult decisions had to be made to stabilise the nation's finances. Priority was given to protecting resources for front line education services as far as possible, which remains particularly challenging with rising numbers of school-going children.

The Deputy should note that, to assist with the costs of the Gaeltacht placement, students who are in receipt of a student grant which includes a 100% fee grant, or who would have quali-

fied for a full fee grant but for the Free Fees Schemes, can apply for funding towards travel and accommodation costs under the field trip element of a fee grant, subject to the normal terms and conditions of the student grant scheme.

Apart from this, in circumstances of particular need, students may apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. Information in relation to this fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended.

Third Level Charges

139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the student contribution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30425/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Based on the number of students that qualified for free fees funding in the academic year 2014/15, and taking into account overall expected increases in student numbers, it is estimated that the net cost to my Department of reducing the Student Contribution by €250 would be €17m. This figures takes into account the resulting reduction to my Department's Student Grant Scheme budget.

While the student contribution now stands at €3,000, it is important to recognise that the state pays this contribution (or part of it) on behalf of almost 50% of undergraduate students. Tax relief provisions are also available so that second and subsequent siblings do not have to bear the full cost. In addition, higher education institutions have provisions in place to allow students to pay the contribution in two moieties.

With regard to future investment in the higher education sector, the report of the Expert Group on the Future Funding of Higher Education is currently being examined by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills with a view to making recommendations on a long-term sustainable funding model for higher education.

I have also taken immediate steps to increase funding for higher education with increased Exchequer funding of €36.5 million secured in Budget 2017 for the higher education sector, the first such increase in nine years.

Departmental Funding

140. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is funding available from his Department for general purpose rooms and PE halls; if not, his plans to offer funding at a future time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30434/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's current priority, within the limited funding available, is the provision of essential classroom accommodation in areas where significant demographic need has been established to ensure that each child will have access to a physical school place. The Deputy will therefore appreciate that all applications for capital funding must be considered in the context of the existing challenging financial circumstances where funding must be prioritised for this purpose and to provide mainstream classroom accommodation where additional teachers are being appointed.

To divert funding which would otherwise be used to provide much needed classroom accommodation for GP rooms would mean insufficient funding being available to provide class-

room accommodation for a growing population.

In this regard, the delivery of new schools together with extension projects to meet future demand will be the main focus of the Department's budget for the coming years.

Teacher Exchange Scheme

141. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the five year rule for primary school teachers temporarily swapping jobs still stands; if there have been cases to the contrary; and if so, if he will list them and the reason they have been treated differently. [30480/17]

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

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

In accordance with the Circular the minimum period for which an exchange may occur is one year and the maximum is five years.

In 2016 the scheme was reviewed under the auspices of Teachers Conciliation Council and to facilitate this review the maximum period for which an exchange may occur was extended to allow applicants a sixth year of exchange in the school year 2016/17. Following a request from teacher representatives that a voluntary transfer scheme for Primary Teachers be considered it was decided to extend the maximum period for which an exchange may occur for one further year. Therefore the period for which an exchange may occur for those teachers in their fifth or sixth year of exchange was extended for one further year subject to other provisions of the circular being complied with, i.e. application by the teacher to his/her Board of management and the approval of the Board of Management being obtained.

The proposal for a voluntary transfer scheme is currently under consideration in my Department.

The number of teachers who availed of the teacher exchange scheme in the school year 2016/17 is 232 of which 10 are in their sixth year of exchange.

Passport Services

142. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding processing times for passports, both renewals and new applications, in view of the fact that it is now coming into the busy holiday period; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [30252/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service is working very hard to manage the high volume of applications being received in recent months to meet the target delivery dates.

There are 61,000 applications currently being processed. The target turnaround time for Passport Express renewal applications is 15 working days and this is being met, as it has over the past six weeks. The target turnaround time for first-time applications and applications for renewal of lost, stolen or damaged passports through Passport Express is 20 working days. These categories of application take longer due to the extra security checks involved. This target turnaround time is also currently being met (down from 24 working days as of 19 June).

The Deputy will be aware a new online passport application service was launched at the end of March this year. As take-up of the Online Passport Application Service increases, it will considerably enhance overall passport processing efficiency and contribute to reducing turnaround times for all channels. Since the launch over 38,000 passport applications were received through this channel which is well ahead of target. The target turnaround for this service is ten working days plus postage and in the majority of cases this target is exceeded comfortably. I therefore urge all Deputies to encourage adults who are renewing their passports to do so online.

In addition to the 300 full time permanent staff already allocated to the Passport Service, since January 2017 almost 230 Temporary Clerical Officers have been assigned to the Passport Offices in Balbriggan, Mount Street and Cork.

Targeted overtime for the Passport Service has also been sanctioned to increase processing capacity.

It is very important that applicants choose the most appropriate application channel, depending on their individual circumstances. Passport Express should only be used by those who are travelling in three weeks or more. Anyone renewing a passport who needs to travel in under three weeks should either apply online or by appointment at the Passport Office in either Dublin or Cork.

Further, I urge all Deputies to encourage citizens to register for the free passport renewal reminder email service provided by my Department at the following web address: <https://www.eforms.gov.ie/en/reminder/passport/>.

Departmental Agencies Data

143. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30287/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are no agencies under the aegis of my Department so the issue raised by the Deputy does not arise.

Consular Services Provision

144. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 142 of 4 May 2017, the measures taken to assist the person in

expediting their appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30339/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is continuing to provide ongoing assistance to the individual at the centre of this long-running and difficult consular case.

Because the matter relates to a process that is ongoing before the judiciary in another country, there are limits to what the Irish Government can do. However, our interests in and concerns about this case have been raised with the Philippines authorities at every available opportunity.

In November 2016 the Embassy of Ireland in Singapore, which is accredited to The Philippines, made a direct approach to the Supreme Court Administrator in Manila, requesting on behalf of the Irish Government that the appeal hearing in our citizen's case be expedited on humanitarian grounds.

On 11th January 2017 an official from our Embassy travelled to Manila and followed up on that representation by raising the case directly and at a senior level with the Philippines Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy official underlined our concerns for the citizen's health and welfare in view of the length of time it has taken for the appeal to be heard.

In April we received a notification from the Supreme Court Administrator informing us that the Court was ordering the elevation of the records to the Supreme Court from the Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court's letter noted that the Embassy of Ireland had submitted a request that the appeal hearing be expedited on humanitarian grounds.

It is important to remember that this is an ongoing legal case and that it is for the citizen's legal representatives to advise him and to act on his behalf in matters before the courts.

Let me assure the Deputy and the House that my Department will continue to provide all appropriate consular assistance to the citizen concerned and his family.

Passport Services

145. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which a naturalised person (details supplied) who was given a passport with an incorrect previous nationality can correct the official document upon renewal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30396/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In all cases, whether it is an applicant's first passport or renewal, the Passport Service issues a passport with the country of birth as recorded on the naturalisation certificate. Any amendment required to the naturalisation certificate is a matter for the Department of Justice and Equality.

Middle East Issues

146. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to recognise the state of Palestine further to the motion passed unanimously by Dáil Éireann on 10 December 2014 calling on the Government to recognise same; and the timeline for Ireland's recognition of the state of Palestine. [30508/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is committed to recognising the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict.

Ireland has long looked forward to being able to recognize a sovereign Palestinian state existing in fact and not just in theory.

In the light of the motions passed by the Dáil and Seanad in 2014, I am also considering whether early recognition by Ireland of a state of Palestine, in advance of its actual achievement on the ground, could play a helpful part in advancing a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There are many varied factors bearing on this question. They include the likely impact of such a move on the peace process, the possible value of recognition as a symbolic gesture, the likely impact on other initiatives and perception by other actors, and the likely effect on Ireland's ongoing influence on the issue. In addition, should I decide to recommend early recognition to the Government, then as an essentially symbolic action the timing of such a move would also be a matter of careful judgement.

I will be carefully considering all these factors in the coming period. I hope to be able to begin with a visit to the region in the near future, enabling me to hear the views of the parties themselves.

Brexit Negotiations

147. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting with Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator on 20 June 2017; and if he is requesting special status for Northern Ireland within the EU in his meetings with his EU counterparts and EU Brexit negotiators. [30509/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I attended the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) on Tuesday 20 June. At this meeting, Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Negotiator, informed Ministers of the outcome of the first round of the negotiations with the UK on its withdrawal from the EU.

I also met with Mr Barnier for a bilateral exchange on Brexit and on the EU's position on the issues specific Ireland as set out in the European Council Guidelines of 29 April and the negotiating Directives of 22 May. I thanked Mr Barnier for his recent visit to Ireland, which included travelling to the border region, and for his continuing support and understanding.

We had a very positive and constructive discussion which clearly confirmed that addressing issues unique to Ireland will be a key EU priority in the negotiations.

I reiterated the Government's position in relation to protecting the gains of the peace process and ensuring that all provisions of the Good Friday Agreement are fully respected and upheld. In particular, I emphasised the importance of the European Council's recognition that "in view of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, flexible and imaginative solutions will be required, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border, while respecting the integrity of the Union legal order."

During our discussion, I expressed my support for the handling of Irish issues as set out in the Terms of Reference agreed between the EU and the UK on 19 June whereby the issues unique to Ireland will be the subject of a dialogue at the level of the two most senior members of the respective negotiating teams. This again underlines the urgency and importance with which Irish issues are being addressed.

I underlined my willingness and that of my officials to continue constructive and regular

engagement with Mr. Barnier and his team as these complex negotiations progress.

I also had bilateral meetings with my counterparts from Luxembourg and Estonia. I used this opportunity, as well as my participation in the GAC (Art. 50), to acknowledge the support of our partners in agreeing to the inclusion in the EU's negotiating position of elements addressing the particular challenges faced by Ireland.

Middle East Issues

148. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Israeli Government Ministers have called for an increase in the number of illegal Israeli settlers in the occupied Syrian Golan by 100,000 over a five year period; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that in 2016 the Israeli Government approved the construction of 1,600 new illegal colonial settlement units in the Golan; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that due to discriminatory housing policies, Syrians are forced to build without permits risking fines and the full or partial demolition of the building in order to meet their housing needs (details supplied); if he will raise this issue with the Israeli Government; and the steps he is taking to ensure that the EU is raising these and related issues with the Israeli Government through its current political dialogue and will do so during the EU Israel Association Council meeting if it takes place later in 2017. [30510/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): In the occupied Syrian Golan, as in the West Bank, the introduction and settlement of communities of the occupying power, to alter the demography of the area, is clearly illegal under international law. It also inherently involves violations of the rights of the occupied population, in terms of seizure of land, discriminatory treatment and other restrictions. The same wide range of tactics are also used by the Israeli authorities to advance this process under a cloak of legality, including planning laws, zoning, military use, national parks etc. None of these measures can alter the fact that the whole process is illegal.

The Government has consistently and repeatedly conveyed these concerns to the Israeli authorities, and highlighted them in our interventions at EU, UN and international level. I will continue to avail of every appropriate opportunity to pursue these issues. It is beyond the means of my Department, however, to attempt to track and take action on every report of specific decisions involved in this process.

Our concerns over these policies are most acute in relation to the West Bank, where they are making impossible the achievement of a peace agreement and the establishment of a Palestinian state. By contrast, it is generally acknowledged that any comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab states will involve the return of the Golan area to Syria.

My primary focus in relation to Syria at present is of course on the appalling violence, destruction and slaughter afflicting the Syrian people across much of the rest of the country.

Commercial Rates Exemptions

149. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to address the anomaly in the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 whereby an exemption is provided for community sports clubs but other community organisations such as theatres are not eligible for a similar exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30364/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that while the Valuation Office comes within my remit, the Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the carrying out of his functions under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 and the making of valuations and decisions in relation to exemptions is his sole prerogative and the Act does not accord me as Minister any function in this regard.

The Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 which was commenced on 8 June 2015 provides for an amendment to Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act 2001 which allows for the exemption from rates of buildings used exclusively for community sport and for partial exemption from rates of buildings used by sports clubs which are registered under the Registration of Clubs (Ireland) Act 1904. The amendment means that community sports clubs are now only liable for rates on buildings or part of buildings that are used for the generation of income. The position now is that buildings that are used for the sale of alcohol or food, retail outlets etc. will be rated but buildings that are used purely for community sport will be exempt such as team dressing rooms, referees room, administrative offices and machine and equipment stores. This change in the legislation was widely welcomed as it has brought greater equity and clarity to the sporting sector.

Regarding the treatment of other community organisations under the valuation legislation, the position is that Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act, 2001 also provides for the exemption from rates of community halls which are used by community-based and not for profit organisations such as theatre and drama groups. To be classified as a Community Hall, the premises needs to be used for purposes which are not for profit or gain and involve participation by inhabitants of the locality generally and are used for purposes which are of a recreational or otherwise of a social nature.

As the existing exemption provisions cover all qualifying community organisations, it is considered that a change in the legislation to provide for further exemptions is not warranted at this time.

Naturalisation Certificates

150. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to amend a certificate of naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) who had their previous nationality incorrectly recorded on their certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30210/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that if a person believes that an error has occurred in the details recorded on a certificate of naturalisation, it is open to the person concerned to contact Citizenship Division (details available at www.inis.gov.ie) who will examine the case and advise on any procedure to be followed.

Departmental Agencies Data

151. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30290/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm that the

Department and its agencies comprising the eight votes in the Justice Vote Group all have up to date tax clearance certificates.

Separately, I am advised by the Garda Authorities that, as the Deputy may be aware, the taxation status of certain entities attached to the Garda College in Templemore is the subject of further review which is ongoing at present.

Garda Civilian Staff Recruitment

152. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the three vacancies in the Garda internal audit unit have been filled to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30326/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The question of additional resources for the Garda Internal Audit Section is a matter in the first instance for the Commissioner and then the Policing Authority which has a role under section 19 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 in determining the number of civilian staff in An Garda Síochána and also in appointing senior civilian staff, subject to the consent of the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

I understand that the Commissioner has developed proposals to fill existing vacancies and to increase the number of civilians assigned to the Garda Internal Audit Section to enhance the capacity of the unit to perform its role in providing assurance to the Commissioner, as Accounting Officer. These proposals are currently being considered by the Policing Authority. I can assure you that my Department will be positively disposed towards any such proposals.

Budget 2017 provided funding for the recruitment of up to 500 civilians to An Garda Síochána in line with the Five-year Reform and High Level Work-force Plan agreed by the Government in July 2016 to fill the critical capacity and skills gaps in the organisation and any additional personnel resources for the Garda Internal Audit Section can be encompassed within this.

Garda Deployment

153. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the particular sections the two retired gardaí who have been contracted to work with the titles of temporary senior administrative assistant have been assigned to work in; the specific roles they have been tasked to carry out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30335/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Strength

154. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons per garda in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, by division, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30371/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Units and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that the allocation of Gardaí is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda resources.

The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in my Department as the recording of the population by area is a matter for the Central Statistics Office. I am, in any case, advised that ratios such as the number of Garda per head of population are not an appropriate tool to use when considering the allocation of Garda resources as they fail to take account of, among other things, the fact that crime levels and types can vary significantly among communities of similar population size.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of children referred to the Garda youth diversion program by county in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of juvenile liaison officers by county for the same years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30379/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware the Monitoring Committee established under section 44 of the Children Act 2001 reports annually to the Garda Commissioner on the effectiveness of the Diversion Programme. This Annual Report provides comprehensive data in relation to the Diversion Programme, including the number of incidents referred to it and the number of individuals involved. The latest available Annual Report of the Monitoring Committee is in respect of 2015. According to this report, which is available on the websites of An Garda Síochána and the Irish Youth Justice Service, the number of children referred to the Diversion Programme in 2015 was 9,807.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of Juvenile Liaison Officers by county for the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 (end April) is set out in the following table. As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

Juvenile Liaison Officer Strength 2015-2017*

Division	2015	2016	2017*
D.M.R.S.C.	5	5	4
D.M.R.N.C.	4	3	3
D.M.R.N.	13	13	13
D.M.R.E.	6	5	6
D.M.R.S.	10	10	10
D.M.R.W.	9	11	11
Waterford	4	3	4
Wexford	3	3	3
Kilkenny/Carlow	2	2	2

Division	2015	2016	2017*
Tipperary	3	3	3
Cork City	7	7	5
Cork North	3	3	6
Cork West	2	2	2
Kerry	4	4	8
Limerick	6	4	4
Donegal	3	3	3
Cavan/Monaghan	2	1	2
Sligo/Leitrim	1	1	1
Louth	3	3	3
Clare	2	2	0
Mayo	2	2	2
Galway	4	4	4
Roscommon/Longford	2	2	2
Westmeath	2	2	2
Meath	3	3	3
Kildare	3	3	3
Laois/Offaly	2	2	2
Wicklow	4	4	4
Total	114	107	112

*As of 30 April 2017

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

156. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda youth diversion projects by county and-or divisional basis in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30380/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, statutory provision in relation to young offenders is set out in the Children Act 2001 (as amended). Part 4 of the Act makes provision for the operation of the Garda Diversion Programme under the general superintendence and control of the Garda Commissioner. The aim of the Diversion Programme is to divert any child who accepts responsibility for his or her criminal or anti-social behaviour from committing further offences, or engaging in further anti-social behaviour, primarily by administering a caution to such a child and, where appropriate, by placing him or her under the supervision of a juvenile liaison officer.

To support the operation of the Diversion Programme, my Department, through the Irish Youth Justice Service, funds some 105 Garda Youth Diversion Projects around the country. These projects are community based multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which primarily seek to divert young people who have become involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour. In 2016, some €12m was allocated by the Irish Youth Justice Service to Garda Youth Diversion Projects and a number of other youth justice community based projects around the country. Similar monies will be expended in 2017. In addition, monies secured from the Dormant Accounts Fund supported the establishment of ten new projects in the period 2015/2016.

A table setting out the number of Garda Youth Diversion Projects by county in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 follows.

County	2015	2016	2017
Carlow	1	1	1
Cavan	1	1	1
Clare	2	2	2
Cork	12	12	12
Donegal	2	2	2
Dublin	33	36	35
Galway	5	5	5
Kerry	1	1	1
Kildare	2	4	4
Kilkenny	1	1	1
Laois	2	2	2
Leitrim	0	0	0
Limerick	6	7	7
Longford	1	1	1
Louth	4	4	4
Mayo	2	2	2
Meath	2	2	2
Monaghan	1	1	1
Offaly	3	3	3
Roscommon	1	1	1
Sligo	1	1	1
Tipperary	4	5	5
Waterford	5	5	5
Westmeath	2	2	2
Wexford	3	3	3
Wicklow	2	2	2
Total	99	106	105

Naturalisation Certificates

157. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the process a person must undertake to correct the nationality on a certificate of naturalisation that they were issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30395/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that if a person believes that an error has occurred in the details recorded on a certificate of naturalisation, it is open to the person concerned to contact Citizenship Division (details available at www.inis.gov.ie) who will examine the case and advise on any procedure to be followed.

Departmental Staff Data

158. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of vacancies for revenue sheriffs and the locations of same, in tabular form; the date on which the positions became vacant; if the positions have been advertised; if so, the closing dates for applications; if recommendations have been made with regard to appointments; and if so, the dates on which such recommendations were made. [30473/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that there is currently only one Revenue Sheriff post vacant, that of the Revenue Sheriff for County Mayo. The post became vacant on 20 April 2017. The post was advertised by the Public Appointments Service on 13 January 2017, along with a second such post in respect of which it is anticipated that a vacancy will arise later this year. This post is that of the Revenue Sheriff for Counties Meath/Louth/Westmeath, the current holder of which will retire on 5 September 2017. The closing date for applications for both posts was 2 February 2017.

Following the selection process, the shortlists of recommended candidates for both posts were received by my Department on 2 May 2017. I propose to bring the matter to Government for decision at the earliest opportunity.

Garda Deployment

159. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new recruits allocated to each Garda division since recruitment recommenced, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30483/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, and I as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of resources and the best possible policing service is provided to the general public.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that just under 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 600 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the following table, as provided by the Commissioner, the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda Division from 2015 to date in 2017.

Number of newly attested Garda allocated

DIVISION	DIVISIONAL HQ	2015	2016	2017 (to date)
D.M.R. EAST	DUN LAOGHAIRE	9	19	14
D.M.R. NORTH	BALLYMUN	19	33	23
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	STORE STREET	22	43	28
D.M.R. SOUTH	CRUMLIN	18	35	28
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	PEARSE STREET	19	44	29
D.M.R. WEST	BLANCHARDSTOWN	30	35	23
KILDARE	NAAS	15	20	15
LAOIS / OFFALY	PORTLAOISE	9	20	17
MEATH	NAVAN	5	19	7
WESTMEATH	MULLINGAR	5	5	12
WICKLOW	BRAY	9	0	4
CAVAN / MONAGHAN	MONAGHAN	10	7	4
DONEGAL	LETTERKENNY	8	5	4
LOUTH	DROGHEDA	25	17	7
SLIGO / LEITRIM	SLIGO	5	5	3
KILKENNY/CARLOW	KILKENNY	10	10	10
TIPPERARY	THURLES	5	15	11
WATERFORD	WATERFORD	14	10	6
WEXFORD	WEXFORD	15	10	7
CORK CITY	ANGLESEA STREET	5	5	10
CORK NORTH	FERMOY	0	5	5
CORK WEST	BANDON	5	0	5
KERRY	TRALEE	9	0	6
LIMERICK	HENRY STREET	8	16	9
CLARE	ENNIS	10	5	0
GALWAY	GALWAY	4	5	0
MAYO	CASTLEBAR	3	0	5
ROSCOMMON/LONGFORD	ROSCOMMON	0	5	0
TOTAL		296	393	292

Departmental Meetings

160. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the names and positions of those that attended a meeting between the national monuments service and the officials of Tipperary County Council on 13 June 2017; the location where the meeting was held; the duration of the meeting; the items which were on the agenda; the correspondence and documents which were provided to attendees; if she will provide a copy of the minutes of the meeting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30468/17]

161. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the names and positions of those that attended a meeting between the national monuments service and officials of Tipperary County Council on 13 June 2017; the location where the meeting was held; the duration of the meeting; the items which were on the agenda; the correspondence and documents which were provided to attendees; if she will provide a copy of the minutes of the meeting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30477/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 and 161 together.

A Senior Archaeologist and an Architectural Heritage Officer from my Department attended a meeting with Tipperary County Council officials on the date in question. The meeting related to traffic management issues on Ardfinnan Bridge which is a recorded monument. The meeting was in the nature of a pre-planning consultation and was at the Council's request. The only document furnished was one drawn up by the Council's consulting engineer regarding potential options.

As all the arrangements for the meeting were made locally, and as the meeting was in the nature of a pre-planning consultation, further information should be sought in the first instance from the Council itself.

CLÁR Programme

162. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason a school (details supplied) was not successfully awarded CLÁR funding despite meeting the necessary requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30211/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31 March last, with a closing date of 5 May. The programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

Funding for the 2017 CLÁR programme was available this year under four separate Measures:

Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure

Measure 4: First Responder Supports

In total, more than 500 applications were received across the four Measures to the value of €15 million.

Funding to support projects under CLÁR this year was limited and it was not possible to fund all applications. In recent weeks, 230 successful projects were approved for funding, with a total of just under €7 million allocated across the four Measures.

In general, applications were assessed on the basis of their eligibility under the scheme criteria and on the quality of the documentation supporting their proposals, as required in the scheme guidelines. I can confirm that the application in respect of the school referred to by the

Deputy was unsuccessful as adequate supporting documentation was not provided.

Departmental Agencies Data

163. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if all agencies under her aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30280/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am pleased to confirm to the Deputy that I am advised that a current tax clearance certificate is held by each of those bodies and agencies under the aegis of my Department.

Arts Council Grants

164. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of Aosdána members who have been refused a cnuas; and the reason for these refusals. [30295/17]

165. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department has considered reforms to Aosdána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30296/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

Aosdána is an initiative established by the Arts Council in 1981 to honour creative artists who have made a significant contribution to the arts in Ireland. There are currently some 250 members of Aosdána. Individual members of Aosdána can qualify for a means-tested payment known as the Cnuas if they are resident in Ireland, are full-time practising artists and if their income is below the threshold for qualification.

The scheme is the responsibility of the Arts Council and not of my Department. Under section 24(2) of the Arts Act 2003, the Arts Council is independent of the Minister in its funding decisions. There are no plans by my Department to make reforms to this initiative.

Details of Aosdána membership including the names of members who receive funding are published every year in the Arts Council's Annual Report and on the Aosdána website at www.aosdana.ie.

Mental Health Services Funding

166. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding ring fencing funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30417/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): A Vision For Change requires that mental health services are accessible to all who require them. The HSE Mental Health Division has prioritised the provision of seven-day services as a key priority for 2017.

The HSE Mental Health Division's first priority is to ensure that all areas provide access to a weekend service for people currently attending the service. In recognition of this, it set up a Service Improvement Project with a dedicated Project Manager resource in November 2016.

This project is focused on a more detailed mapping of current provision at weekends and extended hours including uptake of the service.

The HSE Mental Health Division is also examining other options such as a phone helpline for people who are attending or have attended the Specialist Mental Health Services in the past. This would enable people in need of advice to obtain this immediately from a mental health professional.

In March 2017, HSE presented proposals for the extension of seven day Mental Health services coverage to Minister McEntee. This included identification of gaps in the current service. HSE advised that the extension would take the form of extra staff being added to existing Mental Health teams to facilitate increased out-of-hours coverage. This plan is currently being finalised.

From 2012 to 2016, around €115 million was added to the HSE Mental Health Budget. This is a significant increase and the Government is strongly committed to further increasing our mental health budget annually, as resources allow, to expand existing services.

Budget 2017 made allowance for an additional €35 million for services to be initiated in 2017. Key priorities to be addressed in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan include youth mental health, further improvement to CAMHs and adult services, older people's mental health services and further enhanced out-of-hours response for those in need of urgent services. Recognising the time lag in new staff taking up posts and the completion of preparations for the introduction of these services, it is estimated that the revenue spend in 2017 associated with this increased allocation will be €15 million. There will also be a further additional spend of €9.5 million in mental health associated with increased pay rates, bringing the total budget to over €850 million.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

167. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure the drug Resprezza continues to be made available for persons suffering from genetic emphysema; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30247/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Data

168. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients out-sourced at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30257/17]

169. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of emergency department attendances at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30258/17]

170. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the outpatient waiting times at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, by year, speciality and wait time bands (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30259/17]

171. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on trolleys at University Hospital Limerick in each of the months of 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30260/17]

172. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on trolleys at University Hospital Limerick in each of the months to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30261/17]

173. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the operating budget for University Hospital Limerick in each of the years 2016 and 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30262/17]

175. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the total agency spend at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30264/17]

176. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of whole-time equivalent nursing positions in place at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30265/17]

177. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds operational at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30266/17]

178. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of outpatient hospital cancellations at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30267/17]

179. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient hospital cancellations at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30268/17]

180. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient and outpatient did not attends at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30269/17]

181. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of theatres operational at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30270/17]

184. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the full capacity protocol was initiated at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30273/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 to 173, inclusive, 175 to 181, inclusive, and 184 together.

As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

174. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the capital budget or total capital spend at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30263/17]

182. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the capital projects agreed and funded at University Hospital Limerick; the details and overview of each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30271/17]

183. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number and cost of each capital project funded by the HSE and his Department at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30272/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174, 182 and 183 together.

As the HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects, the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the approved capital projects it has funded and their cost at University Hospital Limerick in 2016 and to date in 2017.

Questions Nos. 175 to 181, inclusive, answered with Question No. 168.

Questions Nos. 182 and 183 answered with Question No. 174.

Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 168.

Departmental Agencies Data

185. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30288/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In line with the Department of Expenditure and Reform's Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies all State Bodies under my aegis must comply with the Code and this includes compliance with tax laws and the requirements of the Revenue Commissioners. The following table sets out the information requested by the Deputy specifically in relation to tax clearance certificates.

As can be seen, 18 of the 19 Agencies have an up to date Tax Clearance Certificate. While the Dental Council has confirmed that it is, and has always been, fully tax compliant it has never been asked for a Tax Clearance Certificate and therefore it does not have one.

State Body	Does the Body have an up to date Tax Clearance Certificate?	Reason why Body does not have a Tax Clearance Certificate
NMBI	Yes	
Dental Council	No	It has not been necessary for the Council to seek a Tax Clearance Certificate.
Food Safety Authority Ireland	Yes	
Food Safety Promotion Board/ Safefood	Yes	
CORU (Health and Social Care Professionals Council)	Yes	

State Body	Does the Body have an up to date Tax Clearance Certificate?	Reason why Body does not have a Tax Clearance Certificate
Health Information and Quality Authority	Yes	
Health Insurance Authority	Yes	
Health Products Regulatory Authority	Yes	
Health Research Board	Yes	
Health Service Executive	Yes	
Irish Blood Transfusion Service	Yes	
Medical Council	Yes	
Mental Health Commission	Yes	
National Cancer Registry Board	Yes	
National Paediatric Hospital Development Board	Yes	
National Treatment Purchase Fund	Yes	
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland	Yes	
Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council	Yes	
Voluntary Health Insurance	Yes	

Hospitals Data

186. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with diabetes attending Children's University Hospital Temple Street diabetes service in 2015 and 2016; the amount of whole-time equivalent consultant time which was dedicated to this service in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30305/17]

187. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time in Children's University Hospital Temple Street to put children with type one diabetes aged five years of age and under on insulin pump treatment; the waiting time to put children with type one diabetes between six and 16 years of age on insulin pump treatment; the number of children who are on the waiting list for insulin pump treatment; the age breakdown of these children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30306/17]

188. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the number of new referrals of children with diabetes received by the diabetes service in Children's University Hospital Temple Street, by county in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30307/17]

189. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the ratio of whole-time equivalent dietitian per patient in Children's University Hospital Temple Street diabetes service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30308/17]

190. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the amount of whole-time equivalent psychology professional time dedicated to the diabetes service in Children's University Hospital Temple Street; the number of persons who have availed of this service in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30309/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 to 190, inclusive, together.

In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

191. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will consider tendering patient testing in the areas of respiratory, neurology, gastroenterology, vascular and cardiology to the private sector in order to cut the waiting times in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30310/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families.

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase and Outpatient Plans which have now been published and are currently being implemented, focus on reducing as much as possible within existing resources the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or outpatient appointment by the end of October. The Scoliosis Action Plan aims to ensure that no patient who requires scoliosis surgery will be waiting more than four months for surgery by the end of 2017.

Under these Plans, since early February, over 14,700 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List, nearly 52,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List and 136 scoliosis surgeries have taken place.

In addition, the NTPF has advised that under the ongoing Daycase Waiting List Initiative over 2,700 patients files have been transferred to private hospitals under this Initiative, over 750 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 230 patients have received their procedure.

In addition, in November 2016, the HSE launched the Strategy for the Design of Integrated Outpatient Services 2016-2020. This strategy seeks to improve waiting times for outpatient services in the long term by restructuring referral pathways and utilising technology to improve service delivery.

Nursing Home Accommodation Provision

192. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health when HIQA will sign off on the new wing in a nursing home (details supplied) in Drumcondra; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30311/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Health Information and Quality Authority is the independent authority established under the Health Act 2007 to drive continuous improvement and to monitor safety and quality in Ireland's health and personal social care services. Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private have been registered and inspected by HIQA.

The functions of the Minister for Health in relation to HIQA and the Chief Inspector of Social Services are prescribed in the Act, and in this respect the Chief Inspector is independent in the exercise of these functions.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Eligibility

193. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will extend the fair deal scheme period of allocation to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30312/17]

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

Home Care Packages Data

194. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care package hours that were available in 2016 and to date in 2017 in the HSE Dublin mid-west area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30325/17]

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

Ambulance Service Accommodation

195. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 72 of 3 May 2017, the progress that has been made in the development of a new ambulance base on the grounds of Merlin Park; when he expects the new ambulance base to be fully functioning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30336/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

196. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) who has been waiting for a procedure for 18 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30338/17]

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.

Drug Treatment Programmes

197. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the progress towards establishing a supervised injecting facility in Dublin. [30340/17]

198. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if he has confirmed with the HSE that a pilot supervised injecting facility will open in Dublin in 2017; and if so, the funding allocated to same. [30341/17]

199. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a pilot supervised injecting facility will open by the end of 2017; the date on which expressions of interest will be sought; the time that will be allocated to receive these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30342/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 to 199, inclusive, together.

The Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Act 2017 was signed by the President on 16 May 2017. It is important to note that the Act will not establish the location of the Supervised Injecting Facility (SIF). However, it is envisaged that the first such facility would be established in Dublin city centre, where there is a significant, recognised problem of public injecting. In line with the experience in other countries which have established such facilities, it is expected that the location will be carefully selected to address, most effectively, the requirements and concerns of the service users and the wider community.

The HSE has been tasked with establishing the SIF in 2017 and has established a working group to gather data, consider possible options and to undertake public consultation before any decision is made on a specific location. Local stakeholder engagement and consultation will be critical to the success of any pilot facility.

It is estimated that it will cost in the region of €1.5m a year to run the SIF. The HSE has been allocated €750,000 in 2017 to set up the facility before the end of the current year.

The Department of Health has been informed that the HSE working group will make recommendations on programme design and governance structures to the HSE Social Inclusion Governance Group (SIGG) to inform an appropriate procurement process.

Substance Misuse

200. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if representatives from his Department or the HSE have met with members of An Garda Síochána and discussed recent reports of heroin and cocaine in circulation that is laced with fentanyl; his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30343/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): My Department and the Health Service Executive have a range of mechanisms for sharing information about the drugs situation with An Garda Síochána, including the Early Warning Emerging Trends Sub-Committee (EWET) of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol and the HSE Public Alert System for adverse events due to drugs.

The EWET provides a forum for representatives from my Department, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and other experts to exchange information on emerging trends and patterns in drug use. Fentanyl and some of its analogues have been on the agenda of the EWET

meetings. In this regard, the Committee has discussed overdose cases identified by Emergency Departments where Fentanyl has been mixed with or mistaken for other opioids, such as heroin.

Another key mechanism is the HSE public alert system for adverse events due to drugs. The HSE remains vigilant for the possibility of Fentanyl entering circulation in Ireland. I am informed that the HSE last issued an alert for Fentanyl on 28 July 2016, arising from a number of drug-related deaths in Dublin and Cork. The HSE has not issued any further warnings/alerts since then, as there is no evidence to suggest this substance is currently in circulation in this jurisdiction. However, the HSE maintains on-going communications with An Garda Síochána in relation to adverse events due to drugs.

General Practitioner Services

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a change of general practitioner form can urgently issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30367/17]

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

HSE Properties

202. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the HSE to return, for use by the local community, land in Shantalla, Galway city, which it took over three years ago for use as a helipad on a temporary basis for six months and has since declined to say when it will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30376/17]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

203. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the estimated time it is envisaged that a person will be fitted with a permanent spinal stimulator since undergoing a trial in July 2016 and whereby funding has been sanctioned (details supplied). [30392/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

204. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30404/17]

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.

General Practitioner Services

205. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints received regarding general practitioners charging for routine phlebotomy services each year since 2009, in tabular form; the number of refunds issued for routine phlebotomy services in each of the CHO areas each year since 2009, in tabular form; the total value of these refunds per CHO area for each year since 2009, in tabular form; and the number of general practitioners each year since 2009 who have had money deducted by the HSE after the HSE ruled the general practitioners in question incorrectly charged for routine phlebotomy services. [30436/17]

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

Medicinal Products Data

206. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the latest figures for State spending on prescriptions for specific serotonin reuptake inhibitors and serotonin noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors; the number of persons according to the latest data who are currently prescribed SSRIs and SNRIs; the number of reports of adverse drug reactions sexual dysfunction for each drug; the number of completed suicides adverse drug reactions involving each drug; the number of suicide attempts or reports of self harm adverse drug reactions involving each drug; the number of suicidal ideation adverse drug reactions involving each drug; the number of serious adverse drug reactions involving each drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30437/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the Health Service Executive and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to reply directly to the Deputy on the issues raised. I have been informed by the HPRA that due to the voluminous nature of your request for data in relation to adverse drugs reactions, it may take longer than the standard ten days for a reply to be issued to your office. I will have officials within my Department liaise with the HPRA to mitigate any further delays.

Hospital Facilities

207. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of cardiac catheterisation laboratories in public hospitals by hospital, by the service it provides and the opening times of each, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30457/17]

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

Departmental Reviews

208. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to initiate a review of the provision of cardiac services at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30458/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy knows, I have committed to two reviews - one to review the impact of additional resources being provided to University Hospital, Waterford including a temporary mobile cath lab, which will take place at the end of the deployment of that mobile lab, and a national review of all Primary PCI services with the aim of ensuring that as many patients as possible have access, on a 24/7 basis, to safe and sustainable emergency interventions following a heart attack and this will obviously include the South East. This review, which will be undertaken based on independent clinical expertise, will examine the issue and make recommendations regarding the future configuration of Primary PCI services, including number and location of centres required to serve our population needs. The review will devise a plan for the achievement of the best patient outcomes possible, reflecting patient safety as paramount.

Departmental Reviews

209. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish all correspondence given to a person (details supplied) in preparation of their review of cardiac services in the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30459/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware, in the preparation of his comprehensive clinical review of the need for a second cath lab at University Hospital Waterford, (UHW) Dr Niall Herity consulted widely and met with all of the key stakeholders, in the course of which he received a number of specific briefings and documents. These have already been made available in response to various Freedom of Information requests.

Hospital Waiting Lists

210. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30479/17]

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 Facilities

211. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if he will establish a sexual assault unit at University Hospital Limerick similar to those operated in counties Cork and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30482/17]

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

Departmental Agencies Data

212. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30279/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I have requested the State Bodies under the aegis of my Department to respond directly to the Deputy, on the specific information requested, as this is an operational matter for the organisations themselves.

Departmental Reviews

213. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the resources that have been allocated in respect of each of the two reviews of fisheries policies relating to fleet capacity and mackerel quotas ongoing in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30363/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On the Review of Mackerel allocation policy between the fleet segments, I can inform the Deputy that within the Seafood Policy and Management Division of my Department, the work involved is being undertaken by one Principal Officer, one Assistant Principal Officer, one Higher Executive Officer and one Executive Officer and is being overseen by one Assistant Secretary General.

Work on the Review of Replacement Capacity Requirements under Sea Fishing Boat Licensing Policy within the Seafood Policy and Management Division is being undertaken by one Principal Officer, one Assistant Principal Officer and one Higher Executive Officer and is being overseen by one Assistant Secretary General. One Clerical Officer has also assisted in this work on an as required basis.

In addition, resources from within my Department's Information and Management Technology Division have also been required in terms of placing material pertaining to both Reviews on the website of my Department.

I am satisfied that sufficient resources have been allocated to the work arising from both reviews.

Teagasc Courses

214. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

amount allocated in each of the years 2010 to 2016 for the provision of green certificate education for farmers; and his views on whether this allocation was sufficient for the provision of courses to meet the demand during those years. [30372/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides annual grant in aid allocations to Teagasc to help fund its activities in providing research, advisory and education services to the farming and agri-food sector. The allocation for 2017 was increased by €1.4m to €128.130m. Teagasc also earn own income from advisory charges, education fees, research grants etc. It is a matter for Teagasc and its governing Board to prioritise funding for particular programmes including the Green Cert programme. As the details requested by the Deputy are an operational matter for Teagasc, the request has been forwarded to Teagasc for direct apply. In line with new Dáil procedures, such information can be requested directly from Teagasc using the dedicated email address: oireachtas@teagasc.ie.

Bovine Disease Controls

215. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the establishment of an infectious bovine rhinotracheitis eradication scheme; and the estimated cost of such a scheme. [30373/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is aware of moves by certain member states toward the introduction of Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR) Eradication Programmes. In this regard a cost benefit analysis study funded by my Department is currently being undertaken in Teagasc. This analysis will cover a number of areas, including (i) the costs associated with the loss of the live export trade in calves and weanling to EU markets and (ii) the on-farm losses associated with reduced output on farms. The outcome of the study will be presented by Animal Health Ireland (AHI) to relevant stakeholders who will decide on whether to progress towards a national eradication programme.

In view of the importance attached to the live export trade, AHI has developed a series of information leaflets providing veterinary practitioners, farmers and their advisers with up to date information on IBR and its control. I would urge all concerned to adopt this advice with a view to minimising the impact of this disease.

Veterinary Inspection Service

216. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost of running the regional veterinary laboratory network by year in each of the years 2010 to 2016; and the expected allocation for 2017 for the maintenance and improvement of the network. [30374/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information is contained in the following table.

Running costs for Regional Veterinary Laboratories 2010 - 2016 and estimated 2017 spend.

-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Estimate
RVLs	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
-	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
*spend on consumables	1.224	1.065	1.222	1.166	1.137	1.209	1.477	1.365

Questions - Written Answers

-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Estimate
RVLs	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
-	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
Energy costs	0.13	0.135	0.14	0.145	0.158	0.138	0.142	0.148
Total	1.354	1.2	1.362	1.311	1.295	1.347	1.619	1.513

*Estimated figures for years 2010 to 2014 based on spend in 2015 and 2016 for RVLs. Breakdown not available prior to 2015.

Estimated figures for years 2010 to 2013 based on spend 2014 to 2016 for RVLs. Breakdown not available prior to 2014.

Agriculture Scheme Administration

217. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the instrument his Department used to alter the terms and conditions of the CAP, SPS, SFP, BPS, ANC, DAS and other schemes between 2011 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30382/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department administers the various schemes provided for under the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy including the Single Payment Scheme, the Basic payment Scheme (BPS), the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, and the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme (ANC) in accordance with the relevant EU regulations.

These regulations currently include Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council, Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council, Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and the Council, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 809/2014, Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 640/2014 and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 641/2014. All of these regulations are directly applicable in Ireland.

My Department, at the start of each scheme year, prepares and circulates a Terms and Conditions booklet for the BPS and ANC scheme to all previous years' applicants. These Terms and Conditions are based on the relevant EU legislation including the regulations listed above as may be amended.

It should be noted that, while the annual Terms and Conditions booklet is prepared as a guidance to farmers, the governing EU Regulations form the definitive basis for the administration of the schemes in question.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

218. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the body from which the independent agricultural appeals office takes direction regarding the validity of an inspection in cases in which it has been proven that an inspection was carried out on a farm and his Department did not comply with the terms and conditions of the scheme in carrying out the inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30383/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are distinct and specific statutory functions that govern Appeals Officers who are required under law to be independent in the performance of their functions when they are making determina-

tions on appeals submitted against decisions taken by my Department. Appeals Officers must also comply with relevant legislation and the terms and conditions and guidelines relating to the schemes and must have regard to the principles of natural justice. A decision on each appeal is therefore taken by Appeals Officers independently, each appeal case being assessed by an Appeals Officer taking account of all the particular circumstances of the case, including the facts presented by both sides involved in the appeal, matters arising at the oral hearing if one was held, the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme and the relevant legislation. Where necessary legal advice is sought from the Office of the Attorney General or Chief State Solicitor's Office.

The appellant may request a review by the Director of a decision of an Appeals Officer if the appellant believes there was an error in fact or in law on the part of the Appeals Officer.

The appellant may also submit a complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman on any aspect of their case and may also take court proceedings on a point of law.

I am satisfied that Agriculture Appeals Office complies with the legislation governing the appeal service.

Severe Weather Events Response

219. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to provide funding for flood relief for farmers who have been adversely affected by flood damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30405/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Minister of State for the Office of Public Works and Flood Relief, recently announced the introduction of a once-off targeted Voluntary Homeowner Relocation Scheme. As part of the announcement the Minister outlined that further examination is ongoing by the OPW, Local Authorities and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in evaluating, on an individual basis, if any alternative remedial works can be undertaken to protect those at risk farm buildings that flooded in order to inform the feasibility of any future once-off targeted scheme for Voluntary Farm Building Relocation.

This is being progressed at present to determine the feasibility of any future scheme and prepare the potential criteria. At this point it is not possible to set out the criteria for any possible scheme.

Forestry Sector

220. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to the announcement in February 2017 of an initiative (details supplied) to purchase forestry, if the land in question was already privately owned; if public land was made available or if it will be made available for a company to buy under this deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30451/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is not involved in the initiative referenced by the Deputy. Therefore, I am not in a position to comment on their current or future intentions. I can say however, that Coillte has not and do not have any current plans to sell land to the company concerned.

This initiative provides an option for forest owners who do not want to wait until the end of

a full rotation to realise the economic value of their forest. The opportunity presented by this fund may allow forest owners to invest this revenue in other parts of their farm or to invest in other non-farm activities.

Another option for forest owners is to hold onto their woodland and manage it themselves. This option is also being promoted by my Department where €250,000 has been allocated in 2017 to a pilot project to test the feasibility of Knowledge Transfer Groups(KTG) for forestry. The aim of this initiative, which is already underway, is to empower forest owners with the knowledge to become forest managers. Furthermore, in November 2016 my Department signed a contract to develop a forest management template to help forest owners achieve certification for their forests. For many forest owners, the KTG and certification projects will help make the option of retaining ownership and managing their own forests an attractive option to consider.

Forestry Management

221. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will make the 10% reforestation figure for broadleaves mandatory; his plans to raise this level to ensure that more native broadleaf tree species are planted here; his further plans to introduce measures to incentivise the planting of native broadleaf species over non-native conifers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30452/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's plans to increase broadleaf planting and in particular to increase native woodlands is currently being undertaken within the context of the midterm review of the Forestry Programme 2014 - 2020. In March 2017 a public call for submissions was made to look at how the afforestation scheme can be improved to increase broadleaf planting. A total of 26 submissions were received which are now being examined. A draft series of proposals will be prepared and circulated to stakeholders in early July 2017.

With regard to reforestation, this represents an opportunity to restructure existing forests and to undertake broadleaf (including native woodland) planting in response to various sensitivities such as water, biodiversity, landscape, public roads and adjacent dwellings. Various measures are set out in the Felling and Reforestation Policy document to ensure that all reforestation is sensitively designed and that the opportunity to reforest with broadleaves is realised. Consequently there are no plans to make it mandatory for forest owners to plant 10% broadleaves at the replanting stage.

Forestry Management

222. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a limit on the planting of the non-native Sitka spruce here in view of its documented negative environmental impacts; his further plans to introduce incentives for the planting of trees which do not have such harmful effects on ecology and biodiversity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30453/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's afforestation scheme comprises 12 different planting options, from commercial Sitka spruce to native woodland to agroforestry. These options can be applied for side-by-side within the same application, to create a farm forest that serves several functions, e.g. forestry for fibre to supply domestic fuelwood to the household, new native woodland to help buffer a sensitive watercourse adjoining the farm, and stands of Sitka spruce, to provide the commercial 'heart'

of the farm forest enterprise. Within this mix of options, grants and premiums are deliberately favoured towards broadleaves. For example, the native woodland categories receive the highest level of grant and premium available.

Within areas planted with Sitka spruce (typically under Grant and Premium Category 3(GPC3)), various rules apply to mitigate any environmental impact and promote positive attributes. For example, such areas require a 10% additional broadleaf requirement, whereby native trees are positioned alongside public roads, along water setbacks and visible landscape edges, to soften any negative impact. Afforestation within GPC3 is subject to adherence to a wide range of measures, ranging from checks regarding protected habitats and species, to required setbacks along public roads, dwellings, watercourses and archaeological sites, to requirements regarding drainage and cultivation, fertiliser application, to contingency planning.

In addition, any application for planting under GPC3 is subject to the requirements under the Forestry Regulations SI191 of 2017, whereby a full assessment is required by the Forest Service. This assessment includes evaluation by a professional forester, referral to third parties such as NPWS, Inland Fisheries Ireland and local authorities, the application of Appropriate Assessment and EIA screening, and public consultation. The Forest Service can also seek further information if this is needed to enable the assessment process to proceed. Other procedures and requirements, such as the Land Types for Afforestation system, the Acid Sensitivity Protocol and the Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements, also apply.

These and other measures ensure that any afforestation, including that with sitka spruce, is undertaken in a way compatible with the protection of the environment. Given the improvements made to rules governing the establishment of new forests following the introduction of the new environmental requirements my Department does not envisage setting limits to the planting of Sitka spruce.

Forestry Sector

223. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce legislation in order that all environmental guidelines including those relating to water quality will apply to afforestation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30454/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forestry Act 2014(the Act), which was commenced on the 24 May 2017, already includes provisions regarding the protection of the environment, creating closer integration with the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the EIA Directive and transposing legislation. Under Sections 5 and 11 of the Act, the role of the Minister in safeguarding the environment is set out. Section 7 provides for the attachment and varying of conditions to a licence or approval and also for the revocation of a licence. Sections 26-29 set out a range of penalties that can be imposed. These sections of the Act provide flexibility to the Minister in terms of attaching environmental conditions to an approval or licence and enforcing those conditions.

Together, the above provisions are designed to integrate the protection of the environment and legal requirements under various relevant Directives and transposing legislation, into the central decision-making process regarding licences, approvals and grants by the Department. This is reflected in the scope of the Act, as follows; “.... to make further and better provision in relation to forestry, to provide for the development and promotion of forestry in a manner that maximises the economic, environmental and social value of forests within the principles of sustainable forest management,....”.

In this context, the new Environmental Requirements for Afforestation document was introduced in December 2016. This document consolidated relevant environmental safeguards into a single coherent document dealing exclusively with afforestation, taking onboard more recent developments in relation to regulation, research and changes in forest practices. This document includes specific measures to ensure the protection of water quality when establishing new forests such as the introduction of new water features requiring setbacks.

The commitment of my Department to protecting and enhancing water quality and aquatic life is demonstrated by: (i) its operation of the Native Woodland Scheme, which includes a strong focus on the use of native woodland, both new and existing, in this regard; (ii) the Woodland for Water model; and (iii) the Felling and Reforestation Policy, which sets out measures that are available to ensure that forests are appropriately restructured post-clearfell, to reflect water and other environmental sensitivities on-the-ground.

Forestry Management

224. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider making commercial forestry plantations here subject to independent oversight by An Taisce, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30455/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme includes a number of measures that ensure that afforestation is carried out on appropriate sites, and that any environmental considerations that might exist are taken into account. Where specific environmental considerations are identified, the application is simultaneously referred to one or more statutory consultees, primarily the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Inland Fisheries Ireland, the relevant Local Authority and An Taisce. Comments submitted by statutory consultees are subsequently considered by the Forest Service of my Department when making a decision regarding whether or not to seek further information, to approve the application (typically with specific conditions), or to refuse it. Furthermore, under the European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas, afforestation applications in NATURA 2000 sites must be agreed with the relevant authority - in Ireland this is the NPWS.

Apart from consultation with statutory consultees, the licensing process regarding the establishment of any new forest is subject to other rigorous checks and balances and undergoes careful planning and assessment by professional foresters. For example, the Forest Service implements Appropriate Assessment Screening, as required under the Habitats Directive, to consider if a new afforestation application has the potential to significantly impact on a qualifying interest of a NATURA site (i.e. an SAC or SPA). Where there is a possibility of this, or where uncertainty exists, the Forest Service seeks a NATURA Impact Statement and subsequently undertakes Appropriate Assessment, to either rule out the potential of a significant impact, or to identify appropriate mitigation measures that will eliminate any risk.

Notice of all applications for afforestation is placed on my Department's website, showing townland, area of the site, etc. In addition, site notices are now required at the proposed entrance to the site in accordance with the new Forestry Act, and submissions from members of the public are considered during the decision-making process.

Furthermore, all new forests must be established in compliance with national and EU legislation and the Department's requirements as set out in the Forestry Standards Manual, Scheme Documents, Code of Best Practice – Ireland and the suite of environmental guidelines, includ-

ing the new Environmental Requirements for Afforestation. Other procedures, such as sub-threshold EIA screening, the Acid Sensitivity Protocol and the Forestry and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements, also apply. Only projects which receive prior written approval from the Department in line with Statutory Instrument No. 191 of 2017, and in compliance with sustainable forest management, can proceed to planting.

My Department considers its existing consultation process, both with the public and with statutory consultees, to be wide-ranging and robust. Given the level of consultation that currently exists with An Taisce, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, my Department does not consider any additional oversight by these bodies to be necessary.

Departmental Agencies Data

225. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30282/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): All of the relevant State Bodies under the aegis of my Department have confirmed that they have up to date tax clearance certificates.

Departmental Data

226. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide a copy of the official diary (details supplied) for the period August to December 2015. [30406/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): A copy of the Secretary General's diary for the period 1 August to 31 December is set out in the following table.

Subject	Date
Katherine Licken Leave	03/08/2015
Ken Spratt leave	03/08/2015
Sec Gen Annual Leave	04/08/2015
Stephanie Annual Leave	19/08/2015
Aught Windfarm	24/08/2015
Patricia Cronin leave	24/08/2015
Meeting w/ Sec Gen	25/08/2015
Meeting re Galway Mayo	25/08/2015
Discussion w/ Maria Owens	27/08/2015
2016 Capital	28/08/2015
Prep for Internal Audit Committee	28/08/2015
Meeting w/ Eanna	31/08/2015
Meeting w/ Stjohn	31/08/2015
Discussion on priorities Broadcasting/Natural Resources to end 2015	01/09/2015
PERSONA	01/09/2015

Questions - Written Answers

Subject	Date
Persona	02/09/2015
Priorities to end 2015	02/09/2015
Meeting on Wind Energy Guidelines	02/09/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	02/09/2015
Sec Gen Annual leave	03/09/2015
Read-through of Comptroller documents	09/09/2015
Galway Mayo	09/09/2015
2016 Capital Estimates update	09/09/2015
Meeting re CER	14/09/2015
Management Committee Meeting	14/09/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	15/09/2015
Bob Hanna - Council Meeting	15/09/2015
White Paper Briefing	15/09/2015
Meeting w/ Orla Quinn	15/09/2015
Discussion on Staffing assignments	15/09/2015
Audit Committee Meeting	15/09/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	16/09/2015
Meeting with Mark	16/09/2015
Leadership development group	16/09/2015
Eircom event	16/09/2015
Galway/Mayo	17/09/2015
IBEC President's Dinner	17/09/2015
SG Debrief	17/09/2015
Discussion on priorities to end 2015 (Corporate Governance, An Post, HR, IT, etc)	18/09/2015
Oral PQ briefing	21/09/2015
Meeting w/ Pat O' Doherty, ESB	21/09/2015
Management Committee Meeting	21/09/2015
IT architecture in the Department	22/09/2015
Oral PQ briefing	22/09/2015
Coffee with Noel Curran	22/09/2015
New Era/An Post	22/09/2015
Oral PQS	22/09/2015
National Framework for Emergency & Crisis Management in Ireland	23/09/2015
Ken Spratt - PMDS AR	23/09/2015
Partnership discussion	23/09/2015
SG Debrief	23/09/2015
Civil Service Management Board	25/09/2015
Management Committee Meeting	28/09/2015
Patricia Cronin	29/09/2015
Errol Close	30/09/2015
Eircodes/Capita meeting	30/09/2015
CAPITA BRIEFING WITH OFFICIALS	30/09/2015
CAPITA MEETING DEBRIEF EIRCODES	30/09/2015
Dinner with Permanent Secretaries	30/09/2015
Ireland/UK Government Officials Summit	01/10/2015
Weekly meeting with Private Secretary	02/10/2015
MC Senior Management meeting	02/10/2015

Subject	Date
ToR, Wind Guidelines	05/10/2015
Presentation to MC	05/10/2015
Management Committee Meeting	05/10/2015
Discussion on A/Sec performance management process	06/10/2015
Capability reviews meeting	06/10/2015
Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards Nominations	07/10/2015
Update on Performance Management Pilot Process for Assistant Secretaries	07/10/2015
Briefing in advance of the Secretary General's meeting with BNM	07/10/2015
Meeting with NBP team	07/10/2015
SG Debrief	07/10/2015
Energy Priorities	08/10/2015
Update on Digital Communications Project	08/10/2015
Photo for website	08/10/2015
Meeting with BNM	08/10/2015
Sec Gen A/L	09/10/2015
Michael Goodwin	12/10/2015
meet MM	12/10/2015
Update on Eircodes	12/10/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	12/10/2015
Discussion re Partnership	12/10/2015
Management Committee Meeting	12/10/2015
Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards Nominations	13/10/2015
Stephanie Half Day A/L PM	13/10/2015
Partnership Meeting Tuesday 13th October 2015	13/10/2015
Change Control memo	14/10/2015
FW: White Paper Update	14/10/2015
Global Irish Economic Forum (GIEF) High Level Interdepartmental Group	14/10/2015
SG Debrief	14/10/2015
Sean O'Foghlu and Fergal Lynch	15/10/2015
Fergal McNamara	15/10/2015
Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards Nominations	15/10/2015
CSMB Governance Group	15/10/2015
Discussion re Business Development Group	16/10/2015
Update Meeting	16/10/2015
Update Meeting	16/10/2015
Head of Human Resources in the Civil Service Mr David Cagney	16/10/2015
Coffee Noel Curran at 4.30pm	19/10/2015
Ciarán Ó hÓbáin	19/10/2015
Meeting with HR	19/10/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	19/10/2015
Eircodes	20/10/2015
Cyber and the Pathfinder Project	20/10/2015

Questions - Written Answers

Subject	Date
Energy Efficiency	20/10/2015
Broadcasting follow-ups	20/10/2015
HR	21/10/2015
Capability Reviews	21/10/2015
Briefing in advance of meeting with DECLG & NewEra on 22 Oct	21/10/2015
Briefing in advance of meeting with CER on 22 Oct	21/10/2015
Coffee with Michael McNicholas, Ervia	21/10/2015
Action 5 of the Renewal Plan	21/10/2015
SG Debrief	21/10/2015
DECLG and NewEra re Chairperson of the Ervia Board	22/10/2015
Meeting with CER re update on Energy matters	22/10/2015
Update meeting - Michael Manley	23/10/2015
Bank Holiday	26/10/2015
Meeting with Mairead re White Paper	27/10/2015
Presentation to MC	27/10/2015
Briefing in advance of meeting with DETI NI	27/10/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	27/10/2015
Management Committee Meeting	27/10/2015
GALWAY MAYO DUCT BRIEF	28/10/2015
REFIT 2 Application	28/10/2015
Pre EPAG BRIEF	28/10/2015

Table continued

Subject	Date
POST OFFICE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP	28/10/2015
Meeting with DETI NI	28/10/2015
GALWAY-MAYO DUCT	29/10/2015
C&AG letter re COMREG	29/10/2015
Visit to 1916 Museum	29/10/2015
Memo on MSM in Ervia	30/10/2015
Philip O'Reilly	30/10/2015
Update meeting - Katherine Licken	30/10/2015
Update Meeting - Patricia Cronin	30/10/2015
Civil Service Management Board at 9.30	30/10/2015
Internet Content Governance Advisory Group Memo	02/11/2015
Meeting on Climate and Energy paper pre CCEICC	02/11/2015
BRIEFING OSI IRELAND	02/11/2015
Presentation by KPMG on Eir Review findings	02/11/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	02/11/2015
Management Committee Meeting	02/11/2015
Whitegate	03/11/2015
CSMB Whole of Government projects (Public Service Card)	03/11/2015
SG session with HR specialist on A/Sec performance review process at 9am	03/11/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	03/11/2015
EWIC Certification	04/11/2015

Subject	Date
SG Debrief	04/11/2015
White Paper	05/11/2015
Eel management submission	05/11/2015
Tom O'Mahony retirement	05/11/2015
Broadcasting Amendment Bill - Response to Obs	06/11/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	06/11/2015
Whitegate update	09/11/2015
Meeting re Persona case	09/11/2015
ORAL PQ BRIEFING	09/11/2015
Galway-Mayo	10/11/2015
Assitant Secretary Performance Final Review - Patricia	10/11/2015
Oral PQs	10/11/2015
Galway Mayo	11/11/2015
Head of IAU - update	11/11/2015
Assistant Secretary Performance Final Review - Michael	11/11/2015
Graham Doyle, Secretary General at Dept. Transport, Tourism and Sport	11/11/2015
SG Debrief	11/11/2015
AQUA COMMS	12/11/2015
NR A/Sec Shortlisting	12/11/2015
SPS Executive Coaching Programme Review	12/11/2015
Galway-Mayo pre-meeting	13/11/2015
Pre-meeting re Galway-Mayo	13/11/2015
Meeting re GNI	13/11/2015
GALWAY-MAYO DUCT	13/11/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	16/11/2015
Galway Mayo	17/11/2015
Dept. Justice Memo	17/11/2015
An Post	17/11/2015
Assistant Secretary Performance - Final Review - Katherine	17/11/2015
IEA MINISTERIAL GOVERNING BOARD	17/11/2015
Meeting re Assistant Secretary Performance Review Pilot	18/11/2015
Revenue Transparency Mtg	18/11/2015
Revenue Transparency	18/11/2015
SG Debrief	18/11/2015
EIRCODES	19/11/2015
Dave Kirwan, BGE	19/11/2015
Talk to Minister re Ervia Chair	19/11/2015
Mike Quinn, BNM re Viridian	19/11/2015
Sustainable Energy Awards 2015 - Black Tie	19/11/2015
Management Committee Meeting	19/11/2015
White Paper	20/11/2015
Global Irish Economic Forum	20/11/2015
Ervia & GNI	23/11/2015
SPS EVENT re Assistant Secretary Performance Review Process	23/11/2015
CER/ComReg staffing/pay	24/11/2015
Bytel Network Ltd	24/11/2015
Clive Brownlee, Praesta re Eriva Review	24/11/2015
Brian Motherway	25/11/2015

Questions - Written Answers

Subject	Date
Fintan Slye	25/11/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	25/11/2015
SG Debrief	25/11/2015
White Paper post SOG	27/11/2015
GALWAY MAYO	27/11/2015
White Paper outstanding issues	27/11/2015
Update meeting - Patricia	27/11/2015
Briefing in advance of meeting with IFI	27/11/2015
Civil Service Management Board	27/11/2015
Stephanie Annual Leave	30/11/2015
SSE Airtricity windfarm, Galway	30/11/2015
Eircode Update	01/12/2015
Inland Fisheries Ireland	01/12/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	01/12/2015
BDG Memo for Govt	02/12/2015
Presentation to MC on HR Strategy	02/12/2015
Management Committee Meeting	02/12/2015
SG Debrief	02/12/2015
Leadership Development	03/12/2015
Civil Service Awards 2015	03/12/2015
Cabinet Committee Day	07/12/2015
TLAC - Head of NR	07/12/2015
BRIEF FOR POST OFFICE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GROUP AND MEMO	08/12/2015
DERMOT DIVILLY AN POST	08/12/2015
SSE Airtricity	08/12/2015
Meeting with International Energy Research Centre	08/12/2015
Copy: FW: AP Forum	08/12/2015
MC Christmas Dinner	08/12/2015
ICGAG Memo Pre-Meeting	09/12/2015
ICGAG Briefing	09/12/2015
SECRETARY GENERAL	09/12/2015
SG Debrief	09/12/2015
White Paper Launch update	10/12/2015
Fergal Lynch at 10.15	10/12/2015
Ciarán Ó hÓbáin	10/12/2015
Moya Doherty	10/12/2015
Alan Barrett, ESRI	10/12/2015
Eircode Update	10/12/2015
Department Christmas party	11/12/2015
Letter to Minister Howlin	14/12/2015
PQ BRIEFING	14/12/2015
Management Committee Meeting	14/12/2015
Oral PQs	15/12/2015
NewEra Protocol	16/12/2015
LAUNCH OF WHITE PAPER	16/12/2015
Letter to Minister Kelly re WE	17/12/2015
FOI/2015/1b - OIC Decision 02.12.2015	17/12/2015
Eircode Update	17/12/2015

Subject	Date
SG Annual Leave	18/12/2015
Post Office BDG	21/12/2015
Meeting with DPER on CER staffing	21/12/2015
Meeting in D/FInance on Act 3 at 11.15	21/12/2015
Letter to eir	21/12/2015
Meeting on FOI High Court Case	22/12/2015
CORRIB	22/12/2015
LETTER ON WEGS	22/12/2015
Eileen Fitzpatrick at 10	22/12/2015
BRIEFING BIOFUEL OBLIGATION SCHEME	22/12/2015
Eircode Update	23/12/2015

Subject	Date
Katherine A/L	24/12/2015
Patricia A/L	24/12/2015
Brief	29/12/2015
SG A/L	29/12/2015
Michael A/L	29/12/2015
Stephanie AL	29/12/2015
Patricia A/L	30/12/2015

Broadcast Advertising Standards Regulation

227. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will introduce a comprehensive statutory system of regulation for online unhealthy food and drinks marketing directed at children; the way in which the State is complying with the World Health Organisation protocol on monitoring food and beverage marketing to children via television and the Internet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30511/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Section 42 of the Broadcasting Act 2009 requires the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) to draw up and from time to time revise Broadcasting Codes on the standards and practice to be observed by Broadcasters.

In this context, the BAI has drawn up the Children's Commercial Communications Code which it published in September 2013. In finalising its Code, the BAI included the principle that all children's commercial communications for fast food products, outlets and/or brands must display an acoustic or visual message stating 'should be eaten in moderation and as part of a balanced diet'.

This Code makes specific provision for rules regarding the advertisement of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) and is scheduled for review over the next 12 to 18 months. It is my understanding that the BAI intends undertaking research as part of the review and will have regard to the experience in Ireland since the Code's introduction. As part of the review process, the BAI will also consider regulatory practices in other jurisdictions and plans to consult extensively with relevant stakeholders including the Department of Health, who have primary responsibility for promoting WHO protocols.

In addition, the BAI participated in a working group, established by the Minister for Health in 2015, to develop rules for marketing communications for food including HFSS on digital

media. The working group has now concluded and a draft code has been submitted to the Department of Health for consideration.

Tourism Industry

228. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to re-establish the former CERT training across the country (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30431/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): While there are no specific plans at present to re-establish CERT or to create any new dedicated training organisation for the tourism and hospitality sector. Rather, projected skills demands across the economy are being addressed through a combination of measures involving various key stakeholders. In line with provision for other sectors, education and training for the hospitality sector is primarily funded and delivered through the higher and further education and training bodies, namely the Institutes of Technology and the Education and Training Boards, with some complementary training and business supports provided by Fáilte Ireland.

I refer the Deputy to my more detailed reply to Oral Question - [PQ 29964/17] of today's date.

Marine Casualty Investigations Board

229. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the role his Department has in selecting members of the Marine Casualty Investigations Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30241/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Section 9 of the Merchant Shipping (Investigation of Marine Casualties) Act, 2000 provides for the composition of the Marine Casualty Investigation Board. The Board consists of three persons (including the chairperson) appointed by the Minister; the Chief Surveyor of the Marine Survey Office; and the Secretary-General of my Department or his nominee. The Board has a panel of independent investigators who carry out the investigations on its behalf.

Appointments made by me as Minister are made in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) Guidelines on State Board Appointments, introduced in 2014. In effect, under this process the Public Appointments Service advertises vacancies on State boards on the portal *stateboards.ie*; invites applications; and shortlists candidates for recommendation to the Minister. A key part of the process is the determination of detailed criteria by the Chair and Board of the MCIB, and my Department, for the effective performance of the role.

In February 2017, I introduced additional Principles and Procedures for State Boards to be applied by my Department alongside the DPER Guidelines, including an additional internal selection process to be undertaken following the receipt of shortlisted candidates from PAS.

I appointed two new members to the Board on 1st April this year, and my Department was involved in preparing material for the PAS process, in the shortlisting procedure, in meeting the shortlisted candidates and in making a final recommendation to me.

Greenways Development

230. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the analysis his Department has done regarding the dual use of greenways by pedestrians and cyclists; and the way to best facilitate both groups in using greenways. [30398/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Greenways are designed to be used by and usable by as many people as possible. Transport Infrastructure Ireland have developed guidelines for Rural Cycle Scheme Design: these guidelines also reference Greenways. Projects funded by this Department must comply with these guidelines, or in the case of urban based greenways, with the Cycle Manual and the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS). These designs include a requirement to have the gradient of the Greenway limited to 5% and are thus suitable for cyclists but also make for very attractive walking routes.

The experience on completed Greenways is that near towns and villages pedestrians significantly outnumber cyclists, by up to a factor of 2 to 1, whilst on the more remote sections these figures reverse and cyclists outnumber pedestrians to the same degree. The great strengths of Greenways are that they are multi-functional and provide access for all. Most Greenways are suitable for those in wheelchairs and pushing buggies and prams.

Signage on both the Waterford Greenway and the Old Rail Trail in County Westmeath has a code of conduct for all users that should be heeded. The importance of sharing the route with all users is emphasised and use of a bell by cyclists to alert pedestrians to their presence is recommended. Experience to date has been very positive for all users.

The public consultation document on Greenways is currently live and I would hope the Deputy will submit his thoughts before the closing date of July 14th. The consultation paper is available on my Department's website. We are interested in receiving a wide input of views from the public and interested parties in order to inform the development of future strategy in relation to this matter.

Road Projects Status

231. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress on the Narrow Water Bridge project, in view of the fact there was a commitment given in this regard in the programme for Government. [25631/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, under the Fresh Start Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government agreed to undertake a review of the proposed Narrow Water Bridge project with a view to identifying options for its future development, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC).

Following on from consultation with stakeholders, I understand that an options paper is being prepared for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council later in the year.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

232. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the

allocation of funds under the sports capital programme for a club (details supplied) will be determined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30209/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): 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 Agencies Data

233. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30294/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, each agency is required to confirm its compliance with obligations under tax law. The position of the agencies in relation to 2015 and 2016 was set out in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 1883 of 20 June 2017. In relation to the specific information requested by the Deputy, I am forwarding this to the agencies under my Department's remit for direct response to the Deputy. If you do not get a reply within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Taxi Regulations

234. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to regulate electrical mechanically propelled rickshaws, in view of the fact that in the absence of legislative regulation persons are afforded no protections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30332/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my answer to PQ (Ref No: 29960/17) which I answered today.

Road Network

235. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to help alleviate traffic congestion with national traffic flowing between the N4 and N7; his further plans with Transport Infrastructure Ireland to develop a new western Dublin orbital route between the N4 and N7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30333/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Transport Infrastructure Ireland, in association with South Dublin County Council, undertook and published a N4/N7 Corridor Study earlier this year. This Study assesses future traffic patterns in this area and possible measures to address forecast travel demand. A Western Orbital Route is one of the possible measures examined.

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants, where applicable. Arising from the arrangements in place in relation to Local Property Tax receipts the four Dublin Councils became self funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015.

As regards the possible measures identified in the TII/ South County Dublin County Council N4/N7 Corridor Study, the further assessment of options is a matter for the local authority taking into account the National Transport Authority's Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area. Provision was made in the current Capital Plan for the upgrade of roads in the vicinity of Grange Castle Business Park and my Department is providing grant assistance for that strategic scheme at present. No other strategic projects in that area are included in the Capital Plan.

Bus Services

236. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of additional, not replacement, buses he plans to make available in 2018 to help deal with traffic congestion in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30334/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, my Department provides annual funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment of the Dublin Bus PSO fleet. The extent to which this funding is used to replace older vehicles or to expand the PSO fleet is determined by the NTA taking account of demand.

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

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

237. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 81 of 10 May 2017, the position regarding the mid-term review of the Government's capital plan; when he expects the review to be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30354/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I outlined to the Deputy in my previous reply, I am seeking additional funding for public transport investment in the mid-term review of the Capital Plan and my Department has made a submission to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard. The finalisation and publication of the mid-term review is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Aviation Industry Regulations

238. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans, in the interest of safety for helicopters and other small aircraft, to introduce regulations requir-

ing warning lights to be installed at the top of all communications masts of a certain height; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30378/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) has statutory responsibility for aviation safety regulation in Ireland, including the regulation of warning lights on communications masts, as provided for under the Irish Aviation Authority Act, 1993.

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

Driver Test

239. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a driving test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30414/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Road Projects Expenditure

240. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budget assigned and being spent on the Macroom bypass in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30456/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Network

241. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if specific additional funding will be provided for road development in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan in the review of the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30471/17]

242. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if con-

sideration has been given to the provision of additional funding from the EU cohesion funding programmes for road infrastructure development in areas such as counties Cavan and Monaghan which will be impacted adversely through Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30472/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Mid-term Review of the Capital Plan is now underway and a number of local authorities (including Monaghan County Council) have made submissions to my Department outlining the case for funding for roads. My Department is making a strong case for additional funding, including the development of a project pipeline for road schemes. While there is a strong case for additional funding for the transport sector, there are a multitude of possible national, regional and local projects around the country, the cost of which far exceed available funding and unfortunately, this means that only a limited number can be put forward for funding.

The final decisions on allocations are, however, matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Government as a whole.

Regarding the question of cohesion funding, my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has overall responsibility for EU Cohesion Policy and the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. Within the overall heading of the ESI funds, Minister Donohoe also has specific responsibility for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). While I understand that Ireland is not considered a cohesion country for the purposes of the current Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme, I understand that Minister Donohoe and his officials are working to secure agreement to successor EU programmes post-2020 and the matters were discussed at the recent Cohesion Policy meeting of the EU's General Affairs Council.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the best options for the development of modern rail and road transport to benefit all regions; the extent to which a review which is under way can be utilised to facilitate the rejuvenation of areas throughout the region deemed to be in need of improved infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30487/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The funding allocation for land transport during the life of the current Capital Plan is just over €10 billion. Of this €3.6 billion is allocated to public transport. Decisions on the transport elements of the Capital Plan in the period to 2022 were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport (SFILT). The SFILT report highlighted the importance of maintenance and renewal of transport infrastructure together with some targeted investments to improve the existing network.

Due to constrained levels of funding available in the early years of the plan, the priority in this period is to ensure the safety and efficiency of existing transport infrastructure. Funding of €2.6bn has been prioritised for essential 'steady state' maintenance and asset renewal of the public transport network and €4.4bn is earmarked for essential maintenance and strengthening works on the road network. A further €600m in the Capital Plan relates to PPP projects and €860m is targeted at progressing a limited number of new roads projects. The remaining €1bn of the total allocation available for public transport is being invested to help address growing

congestion driven by the recovery and population growth.

As the Deputy is aware, a mid-term review of the Capital Plan has been initiated and I will be making the case for increased funding for land transport in that context. In addition, the role of heavy rail in Ireland's transport sector is currently under review. As noted within the *Rail Review Report*, its analysis predates the finalisation of the National Planning Framework which is being developed at present under the leadership of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. It is obvious that, once agreed by Government, the approach which that Framework adopts toward land-use planning and settlement patterns for the country will have significant impacts on the potential of rail and other transport infrastructure and services into the future. I look forward to the finalisation and adoption by Government in the coming months of the new National Planning Framework, which I believe will form an important context for my consideration of issues raised by the *Rail Review Report* and any recommendations I will bring to Government in this regard.

Road Network

244. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he and his Department can accelerate the programme to replace, improve or upgrade motorways, roads and bridges deemed to be in need of improvement or replacement having regard in particular to traffic volumes, the need to encourage development evenly throughout the country and to replace infrastructure now incapable of meeting its original requirements in already highly developed areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30488/17]

245. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will prioritise road development proposals for the next five years in the greater Dublin area and throughout the regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30489/17]

253. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which plans can be formulated to enhance, improve and replace in addition to the existing location whether at that location or alternatively in view of the revenues arising from the M50 tolls, with a view to ensuring improved high quality and safe transport throughout the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30498/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 244, 245 and 253 together.

The 7 year transport element of the Capital Plan published in September 2015 sets out transport investment priorities to 2022. Decisions on the transport elements of the Capital Plan in the period to 2022 were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport (SFILT). The SFILT report highlighted the importance of maintenance and renewal of transport infrastructure together with some targeted investments to improve the existing network. The existing planned investment programme takes account of projected Exchequer funding and toll income.

Tourism Industry

246. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the

extent to which the infrastructure required by the expanding tourism sector needs to be upgraded; his plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30490/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides capital funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital programmes.

However, the Government has allocated a total of €125.705 million to Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Investment Strategy 2016-2022, for investment in large and small tourism capital projects, strategic partnerships with State bodies (Coillte, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the OPW) to maximise the tourism assets of those bodies, and direct investment in such projects as signage for the Ireland's Ancient East brand.

This capital investment is designed to both develop new tourism attractions and enhance the quality of Ireland's existing tourism offerings through the upgrading of facilities and interpretation at tourism attractions and experiences across the country. My Department's capital investment in Ireland's tourism product aims to continue to motivate large numbers of international tourists to visit the country.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

247. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications received to date in respect of the sports capital programme; if he expects to be in a position to meet in part or in full the current requirements from available resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30491/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging and unfortunately there will be many valid applications which we cannot fund on this occasion.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Tourism Industry

248. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which efforts continue to distribute the tourism industry evenly throughout the country with particular reference to the development of facilities at required locations having particular regard to assessments carried out to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30492/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): 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 capital funding to Fáilte Ireland to invest in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of tourism capital programmes, such as Fáilte Ireland's Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects, nor any role in the evaluation of individual applications under this scheme.

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

Sports Events

249. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department continues to make efforts to attract major sporting events here with particular reference to world or international events, thereby creating extra economic opportunities and in the course thereof providing useful promotion of Ireland's image on the international stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30494/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The hosting of major sports events, both participative and spectator sports, can provide great opportunities to showcase Ireland and drive international visitor numbers. In addition, the media coverage of sports events helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination.

Accordingly, I am very supportive of the ongoing efforts of the tourism agencies and the national governing bodies of sport to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs/benefits involved in any State financial support, in particular the number of overseas visitors.

For example, the Government assisted the IRFU in its successful bid to host the Women's Rugby World Cup which will take place in August 2017. The Government also supported the FAI in its successful bid to host four games as part of the UEFA Euro 2020 football championship and the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive are supporting the IRFU in its bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. Ireland has successfully passed the Applicant and Candidate Phases of that process and is now through to the Evaluation Phase, following the IRFU's lodgement of the Irish bid on 1st June 2017. A final decision will be made by World Rugby on 15 November 2017.

A number of other world or international events are due to take place in Ireland in 2017 with the support of Government. They include the International Taekwon-Do World Championships, the Japan Karate Association World Championships, the European Senior Bowling Championships, the World Youth Coarse Fishing Championships, the FIBA Under-18 Women's European Basketball Championships and the International Karate Union World Championships.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

250. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department has studied the weakest links in the transport system nationally; his plans to address these; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30495/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway by Government to look at where capital investment priorities lie over the remaining 4 years of the current plan. I am engaged in making our case to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for increased funding for a variety of important capital investments. These will, where agreed, address deficiencies in the current transport network. I understand that all Departmental submissions relating to the capital Plan will be made in due course and that a final decision on these submissions will be made by the Government as part of the 2018 estimate.

In addition, my officials and I are continuing to analyse possible risks to our transport networks arising from Brexit and to plan measures on how to mitigate these.

Sports Events

251. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding discussions on hosting the Rugby World Cup here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30496/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland is bidding to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023 and has completed two of the three phases of the bid. The Applicant Phase was completed on 25 August 2016 with the submission of a Bid Questionnaire and Ireland subsequently qualified to progress to the more intensive Candidate Phase in October 2016. The formal bid to host the Rugby World Cup, in the form of a Candidate File, was submitted on 1 June 2017. The Candidate File ran to approximately 1,000 pages setting out responses to over 350 questions asked by World Rugby on a range of topics. The bidding process is now in the Evaluation Phase and the final decision regarding the winning bidder will be taken by a vote of World Rugby Council in November 2017.

As the Deputy may be aware, I am progressing the Rugby World Cup 2023 Bill 2017 through the Oireachtas at present to enable the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide the guarantees and undertakings sought by World Rugby to support the staging of the Rugby World Cup.

Tourist Accommodation

252. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which adequate hotel accommodation exists to meet the demands of the expanding tourism sector; his plans to meet deficits in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30497/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Fáilte Ireland monitors the performance of tourist accommodation through regular occupancy surveys. This analysis indicates that while the country as a whole has sufficient stock of tourist accommodation, there are capacity constraints in areas of high tourist traffic at times of peak demand and additional capacity is required in certain parts of the country, par-

ticularly Dublin city.

In this context, Fáilte Ireland commissions periodic assessments of hotel accommodation in Dublin. Although the results confirm the current shortage, they also indicate that there should be sufficient stock - whether being developed currently or being planned - to meet projected demand in the future, with the bulk of new stock due to come on-stream after 2018.

With specific regard to factors within my Department's and Fáilte Ireland's remit, revised hotel Regulations were introduced last August in response to consumer preferences and in order to boost the economic rationale for investment in hotel development. The changes set out in these Regulations should make investment even more attractive by allowing hotel operators provide more rooms and operate at a lower cost base, thereby improving hotel capacity, competitiveness and profitability. Consumers should also benefit in terms of increased room capacity, competition and range of accommodation.

Question No. 253 answered with Question No. 244.

Tourism Policy

254. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which potential growth opportunities for business tourism here continue to be identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30499/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. The development and promotion of individual tourism sectors such as business tourism is a matter for the Boards and Management of Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for the development of the business tourism sector, whereas Tourism Ireland is responsible for overseas marketing of Ireland as a destination for business tourism.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to both tourism agencies for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Regional Airports

255. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that adequate focus remains on the need to ensure the future of regional airports in the context of a modern economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30500/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am satisfied that my Department maintains adequate focus on the regional airports in Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock, Kerry and Waterford, commensurate with the scale of operations at these airports. This is reflected in the National Aviation Policy which acknowledges the role played by these smaller airports as being important in promoting a level of connectivity to support the tourism and business sectors in their regions. Exchequer support under the Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019 for safety and security projects and activities at these airports will be continued where appropriate and in this regard, the Deputy will have seen last week that I approved almost €2 million in capital grant allocations under this Programme for these airports.

It is of course a matter for the airports themselves to exploit all potential opportunities to

develop air services at their facilities.

Departmental Agencies Data

256. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all agencies under her aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30281/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am advised that the State Agencies under the remit of my Department have up to date tax clearance certificates.

Child and Family Agency

257. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of the management structure of Tusla; and the reporting relationships and accountability mechanisms within Tusla and regarding her Department. [30355/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to advise that this is an operational matter for Tusla and my officials have requested that they reply directly to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Data

258. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if internal management meetings are held within Tusla; if representatives from her Department are present at these meetings; the number of such meetings; and the frequency of said meetings. [30356/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has asked Tusla to advise on the frequency of internal management meetings. My Department does not attend such meetings.

As the parent Department with responsibility for the oversight of Tusla, formal meetings are held between officials of my Department and Tusla's Senior Management Team. This is done on a monthly basis. The primary purpose of these meetings is to review performance with reference to Tusla's Business Plan. The meetings also afford an opportunity to discuss other important matters. Separately, the Secretary General of the Department meets Tusla's Chief Executive on a monthly basis.

In addition, and in light of the range of policy areas that influence Tusla's work, officials in my Department are in regular contact with their counterparts in Tusla. This involves regular bilateral meetings. The number and frequency of such meetings will vary.

In addition to the meetings held by Department officials with Tusla's Senior Management, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and senior officials meet on a quarterly basis with the Chairperson of the Board, the Chief Executive, and Chief Operations Officer of Tusla.

Child and Family Agency Data

259. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children referred to Tusla each year. [30357/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the numbers of referrals to Child Protection and Welfare Services received during the years 2014 to 2016 are as follows:

- 2014 = 43,630 referrals received during the reporting year.
- 2015 = 43,596 referrals received during the reporting year.
- 2016 = 47,399 referrals received during the reporting year.
- 2017 = 12,734 referrals received from January until the end of March.

It should be noted that more than one referral can be received in respect of one child or a particular issue relating to that child. Not all referrals will become cases.

Child and Family Agency Services

260. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children that Tusla engages with each year; the typical levels of engagement that Tusla has; and the way in which Tusla measures its outcomes. [30358/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla-Child and Family Agency engages with thousands of children each year across all of its services. The level of engagement involved will be determined for each child and family by the needs identified in each case. It is not possible to provide a complete overview of all of the engagements between Tusla and children as this can be a once off or short term engagement or may involve a more sustained and targeted service for the child. Tusla regularly publishes performance and activity data about its services. However, this data is indicative of the use of these services only and is not intended to reflect all possible engagements that Tusla undertakes as part of its broad remit.

Tusla's Child Welfare and Protection Services provide an example. In March 2017, Tusla reported that there were 25,384 open cases, where each case represents a child in receipt of social work services. This number does not capture engagements with all referrals to Tusla of child welfare and protection concerns, of which there were 47,399 during 2016. Referrals are the subject of a preliminary enquiry and/or an initial assessment and in many instances this will involve engagement with a child and their family through, for example, family supports. In addition, Tusla provides a range of services which may involve working with children and families, including domestic violence services, adoption services, Education Welfare Services and Family Support Services. Data on a range of service performance indicators is available on Tusla's website (www.tusla.ie) and are published on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.

Child and Family Agency Services

261. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a parliamentary question liaison unit within Tusla. [30359/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is a public body which operates under the aegis of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I can confirm that Tusla has a designated unit in place which deals with Parliamentary Affairs.

The Parliamentary Affairs unit within Tusla provides information to my Department on request to inform responses to Parliamentary Questions and other Oireachtas Business, including representations.

Child and Family Agency Staff

262. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the different pay grades within Tusla; and the number of persons employed at each level. [30360/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to advise that this is an operational matter for Tusla and my officials have requested that they reply directly to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency

263. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the detail of the layers of management within Tusla in addition to its correspondence with her Department. [30361/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to advise that this is an operational matter for Tusla and my officials have requested that they reply directly to the Deputy.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

264. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 19 of 11 June 2017, the progress on the issues raised; her plans for the provision of specialist expertise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30362/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have appointed a team of international technical experts to produce an advisory Technical Report for Government to help inform the decisions which need to be taken in relation to the burial site associated with the former home in Tuam.

The team is led by Consultant Forensic Archaeologist Niamh McCullagh. Ms McCullagh is an Irish based expert with extensive national and international experience, including work with the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains in Ireland. Significantly, Ms. McCullagh already has a detailed understanding of the site as she led the Commission team which located, identified and conducted the preliminary excavations of the burial chambers in Tuam.

Her team of experts will includes Hugh Tuller, a Forensic Anthropologist from the United States, and Dr. Tim Clayton, a Forensic Scientist from the United Kingdom who is world renowned in the field of DNA testing. The team has commenced its work and will also consult

with additional Irish and international experts as it considers appropriate.

The Terms of Reference of the expert group's work are available on my Department's website at www.dcy.gov.ie.

I have asked the team to submit a Technical Report on the Tuam Site with detailed work on options for the future and what these would involve from a practical perspective, by the end of September. I have requested that the team provide its technical advice in layperson's language in order that we can all understand the options for the site and what each such option would entail.

This Report will help us have a informed consultation on the future of the site and help to answer the many important questions raised by the Deputy.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

265. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the ECCE scheme and the discrepancy that arises for children born near the end of September (details supplied) who cannot avail of the full two years of free child care, the way in which this situation will be rectified in order that the scheme is equitable to all children and to allow their parents to avail of the full two years of child care. [30381/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Providing free pre-school for children from the age of 3 was a key recommendation of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy. Expansion of ECCE was also given significant consideration by the Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment in Childcare which reported in July 2015. Senior officials from the Department of Education and Skills contributed to the discussions on an upper age limit for the scheme, taking a child centred approach.

The initial Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme had one entry point (September) from when children could begin pre-school, and children had to be aged between 3 years and 2 months and 4 years and 7 months by the September to avail of the free pre-school year (i.e. 38 weeks). The programme was then expanded beginning in September 2016 by reducing the age of eligibility to 3 years and by increasing the number of entry points to three throughout the programme year (September, January and April). This means that children can begin to avail of their free place on the pre-school programme as soon as possible after they reach the age of 3.

The upper age limit for the free pre-school programme is set at 5 years and 6 months, meaning that if a child is going to be older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of a pre-school year (i.e. end of June) they are not eligible to avail of free pre-school in that year. This upper age limit was set in consultation with the Early Years Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Skills to comply with legislation relating to the age range of children beginning primary school and to ensure that children transition into primary school with their peers. Therefore the maximum number of free pre-school weeks to which a child is entitled depends on their date of birth, and the age at which they start primary school. On average, children will benefit from 61 weeks, a significant increase on the previous provision of 38 weeks. It is estimated that access to the average 61 weeks of ECCE reduces the cost of childcare by €4,000 per child.

The eligibility for ECCE from age three using multiple entry points was also a recommendation in Right from the Start, the Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, published in 2013. The objective of this recommendation was to ensure that all children could access free pre-school from as near as possible after their third birthday until they

started primary school. This would ensure that children and families had access to care and education in these formative years.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as is possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied in a fair manner. The rules for all the Department's childcare schemes are clearly published to ensure transparency and consistent application. An essential component of the scheme's rules is an eligibility date to ensure that the scheme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

Care Orders

266. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of applications for full care orders that have been made in respect of children already in voluntary care orders in each of the past seven years. [30393/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am unable to provide the Deputy with the information requested. I am advised that the information referred to is not collated on a national level by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Children in Care

267. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases in which placements broke down after an application was made for a child to be made a ward of court until 18 years of age over the past five years in which that child was in the placement for six years previous to the application. [30445/17]

268. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases in which placements broke down after an application was made for a child to be made a ward of court until 18 years of age over the past five years in which that child was in the placement for five years previous to the application. [30446/17]

269. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases in which placements broke down after an application was made for a child to be made a ward of court until 18 years of age over the past five years in which that child was in the placement for four years previous to the application. [30447/17]

270. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases in which placements broke down after an application was made for a child to be made a ward of court until 18 years of age over the past five years in which that child was in the placement for three years previous to the application. [30448/17]

271. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases in which placements broke down after an application was made for a child to be made a ward of court until 18 years of age over the past five years in which that child was in the placement for two years previous to the application. [30449/17]

272. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of cases in which placements broke down after an application was made for a child to be made a ward of court until 18 years of age over the past five years in which that child was in the placement for one year previous to the application. [30450/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 to 272, inclusive, together.

The Court Service of Ireland outlines on its website the reasons why it might be considered necessary to take a child into wardship. The most common situation is where a minor has been awarded substantial damages by a court and has special housing or care needs. If a house is being purchased from his funds, the house must be registered in his own name and it is necessary for him to be taken into wardship so that the legal formalities on his behalf in this regard can be complied with.

Neither my Department nor Tusla has a role with Wards of Court, who are the responsibility of the Courts Service. If a child or young person in the care of the State is a Ward of Court he or she receives services and supports based on the Statutory Care Plan developed following an assessment of needs, carried out on coming into care and reviewed in accordance with the Child Care Regulations 1995.

The Deputy may be referring to children who are the subject of a Care Order, sought by the Child and Family Agency under Section 18 of the Child Care Act, 1991. Tusla has this information in relation to each individual child to whom it applies but does not collate the figures at a national level.

The Deputy may be interested to know that Ireland has a high level of stability of placement for children in care and compares well with neighbouring countries. Latest figures available on placement stability show that in December 2015, 132 children in care were in their third placement or higher during the previous 12 months. This represents 2% of the overall number of children in care. In the same period, England reports 10% of their children are in their third or higher placement, indicating that placement in Ireland is substantially more stable than for children in care in England.

Family Resource Centres

273. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of funding for a resource centre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30505/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency administers the Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme. Under the Programme, Tusla provides financial support towards the running costs of Family Resource Centres nationwide. FRCs provide a range of universal and targeted services and development opportunities that address the needs of families.

The FRC referred to by the Deputy has been in receipt of funding under the Family Resource Centre Programme since 2007. Tusla has advised that 2017 funding for this Centre is €98,770, which covers the salaries of a full-time Co-ordinator, a part-time Administrator, and a part-time Development and Outreach Worker. In addition to this funding, the Centre is also in receipt of Tusla funding for the provision of relationship, bereavement and child counselling. The Counselling Grant received by this FRC for the current year comes to a total of €6,100.

The work of this Centre focuses on a range of services, supports and development opportunities aimed at young children, teenagers and parents. Supports and services include evidence-based parenting programmes, counselling, mental health awareness, education courses, youth groups, art and cookery courses, as well as a resource for local community groups to congregate.

It should be noted that speech therapy services for children come under the aegis of the Health Service Executive (HSE) and my Department has no role in this area.

Disability Allowance Appeals

274. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding a decision to refuse a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30407/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 05 April 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

275. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will be made on a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30245/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's benefit (CARB) was received from the person concerned on 8 March 2017. The application is currently being examined by a deciding officer and once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Applications

276. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of the partial capacity benefit review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30246/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial Capacity Benefit (PCB) is a payment which allows a person, who may not have full capacity for work, return to employment and continue to receive a payment from my Department. A person who applies for PCB will, in the first instance, be assessed by a Medical Assessor who will assess the restriction on their capacity for work. A person assessed with a moderate level of work incapacity will receive 50% of their payment by way of PCB; a person assessed with a severe level will get 75% and a person assessed with a profound level will get their full payment.

The person concerned is in receipt of 50% of payment by way of PCB, the level of work incapacity having been assessed as moderate by a Medical Assessor. An appeal of the assessment was requested in January but, due to work pressures, it was not referred to another Medical Assessor until May. The opinion of the latter is that the level of work incapacity is also moderate. The case will, therefore, be referred to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination.

Every effort is being made to expedite the claim and my Department regrets the delay in processing the matter.

Departmental Agencies Data

277. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all agencies under her aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30292/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal.

I can confirm that the Citizens Information Board and the Pensions Authority have up-to-date tax clearance certificates.

As the financial and budgetary matters in relation to the operation of the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman and the Social Welfare Tribunal are administered directly by my Department, the requirement for these bodies to hold separate tax clearance certificates does not arise.

Social Welfare Overpayments

278. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will revise a deduction being made on a social welfare payment for a person (details supplied) who has an overpayment owing to her department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30302/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm my department has been in contact with proposals for the recovery of the debt owed to the department. The person concerned should respond to the proposal letter issued to him on 22 June 2017 and supply an income and expenditure statement. On receipt of this information, the deciding officer may revise the deduction.

The person in question is currently in receipt of full rate disability allowance and half rate carers allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Review

279. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to review the

operation of the domiciliary care allowance scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30324/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy will be aware, the domiciliary care allowance (DCA) scheme transferred to the Department of Social Protection in 2009, at which point some 24,000 children were in receipt of the allowance. This figure has risen every year since and now stands at just under 36,000, with 60% of parents also getting carers allowance in respect of their child. All parents in receipt of DCA also receive the annual carers support grant in June each year. Recently, eligibility to the medical card was extended to all children in receipt of the allowance.

A review of the operation of the DCA scheme was undertaken in 2012, and led to the introduction of a revised application process with a revised application form which has increased the percentage of applications that are awarded initially to over 75%, significantly more than before the application processes were revised in 2013. Eligibility can be more easily established if the application form is fully completed and any supporting documentation is provided with the initial application. The numbers of applications referred to the Social Welfare Appeals Office has reduced in recent years and while the percentage allowed on appeal is significant, this is due in many cases to new information being presented at appeal which was not previously available.

Processing times for DCA are currently not meeting the target of having 70% of applications processed within 15 weeks. Currently it is taking up to 18 weeks on average to finalise an application. This is due to a number of factors.

First, there has been a significant increase in the volume of applications. The numbers applying for DCA have doubled since 2010, when the Department took over administration of the scheme from the HSE. The increase in volume over recent years has been consistently in the 15-20% range per annum.

Secondly, following a high court ruling in 2016, there is now a need for the Department's medical assessors to provide the deciding officer with a more detailed opinion on the child's eligibility for the scheme and for the deciding officer in turn to provide more detailed reasons for their decision when communicating this to the customer. These factors have resulted in the time taken to finalise applications increasing significantly and as a result the numbers being processed have reduced and the timescale to finalise each application has increased.

In response to the current situation, additional deciding officers are being assigned to the scheme and will take up their positions shortly. Once these extra resources are in situ and operational, the extra processing capacity should allow for an improvement in processing times.

This matter is being kept under ongoing review.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Citizen Information Services

280. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to the report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection on the proposed restructuring of MABS and CIS, her plans to issue a policy directive to CIB under section 9 of the Citizen's Information Act 2007 to abandon the flawed restructuring process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30328/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the

Citizens Information Board (CIB) has statutory responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and the Citizens Information Services (CIS). As a statutory body, the Board has the sole right to make decisions on its day to day operations as it sees fit. In November 2014 the Board of the Citizens Information Board decided to restructure the CIB/MABS networks. In October 2016 the Board decided that the new structure should be regionally based. In February 2017 the Board adopted a recommendation that the current structure of 93 companies would be replaced by 16 companies, comprising eight (8) CIS boards and eight (8) MABS boards. The restructuring process is currently in the implementation phase and is expected to be completed in 2019. This restructuring, when implemented, is designed to improve the effectiveness of the control environment, financial management, and governance of the services.

It would not be lawful or appropriate for me, as Minister, to seek to intervene in such a decision, taken by the Board.

Furthermore, as the Deputy will know, my predecessor sought advice from the Office of the Attorney General on this matter and that Office has confirmed that Section 9 of the Citizens Information Act, 2007 does not give me such power.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility

281. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason seeking maintenance from the other parent is a condition for lone parents to continue to be eligible for the one parent family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30350/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is a condition of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) that lone parents must make efforts to seek maintenance from the other parent. This requirement is laid down in Articles 125 and 126 of S.I. No. 142/2007 of Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) Regulations 2007, as amended.

The 'efforts to seek maintenance' condition is regarded as being satisfied once appropriate efforts are made to seek maintenance even if this does not result in a maintenance arrangement. The condition is regarded as being satisfied once appropriate efforts are made including but not limited to evidence of a private maintenance arrangement, a court summons or evidence of court proceedings or evidence of a mediation process.

It is important to note that since 2001, OFP claimants are allowed to retain 50 per cent of any maintenance received without a reduction in their social welfare entitlements as an incentive to seek support. Vouched housing costs of up to €95.23 per week (rent or mortgage) may be offset against maintenance payments with half the balance of maintenance being assessed as means in establishing the rate of OFP due.

The Department was in the process of reviewing maintenance policy for lone parents however the Independent Review of the changes to the OFP scheme, currently underway, has taken priority.

One-Parent Family Payment Eligibility

282. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way in which her Department checks if a lone parent has actively sought maintenance from the other parent in

order to remain eligible for their one parent family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30351/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A lone parent is required to make efforts to seek maintenance in respect of their child/ren from the other parent in order to be eligible and to remain eligible for the One Parent Family Payment (OFP).

Both the OFP application and the ongoing review processes for this scheme require customers to provide details of efforts to secure maintenance. Some claims may be referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) prior to a decision by a Deciding Officer, in order to establish if the conditions of entitlement to OFP, including maintenance, are satisfied. In some cases, the spouse/civil partner or other parent of the child/ren may also be visited by a SWI in order to review the maintenance arrangements.

If there is any change in the circumstances of an OFP recipient that may affect their payment, including maintenance, he/she is obliged to notify my Department immediately. If an OFP recipient does not make such efforts as are reasonably required by my Department to seek maintenance, s/he must explain why s/he is not doing so. Where an OFP recipient does not cooperate in making efforts to seek maintenance, when it would be feasible and reasonable to do so, s/he may be disqualified from receiving the OFP.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

One-Parent Family Payment

283. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a lone parent has had their one parent family payment suspended, reduced or removed on the grounds of not seeking maintenance from the other parent; and if so, the number of instances in which this has happened in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30352/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested in respect of lone parents who have had their one parent family payment suspended, reduced or removed on the grounds of not seeking maintenance from the other parent during each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017 is not available in my Department.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

284. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection report entitled, Report on the Position of Lone Parents in Ireland, published online in June 2017; her views on this report and in particular, the recommendations made by the committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30353/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I have recently received the report of the Joint Committee on Social Protection on the position of Lone Parents in Ireland.

I would like to thank the Committee for their work on this issue which I know included discussions with a wide range of stakeholder groups and officials from this Department. I have no doubt it will make a valuable contribution to the policy on this issue.

The report and its recommendations are currently being considered by my Department.

In addition the independent review of the changes to the One-Parent Family Payment, which was agreed during the passage of the Social Welfare Act 2016, is currently well underway and is due to report by the end of August this year.

I anticipate that both of these reports will be of great assistance to me and my Department in this important area.

Departmental Administrative Arrangements

285. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the functions and responsibilities she now has in terms of her employment remit; the functions of the former Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation which will be transferred to her Department; the agencies and statutory bodies under the aegis of the former Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation which will be transferred to her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30384/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the announcement by An Taoiseach on 14 June of the transfer of labour affairs and labour law responsibilities from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to the Department of Social Protection, the process of identifying the functional areas, staff and resources that will transfer to my Department has begun. This is being done in accordance with the *Transfer of Functions Guidelines and Best Practice Handbook*, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2016.

In accordance with those guidelines, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation is taking the lead in this process. When the details have been agreed in consultation with the Department of the Taoiseach, a Transfer of Functions Order will be brought to Government by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to give effect to the changes involved.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

286. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) of the decision to refuse a domiciliary care allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30401/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 19 June 2017 who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

287. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the rate of jobseeker's benefit; and if she will make

a statement on the matter. [30415/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Reduced rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009 and extended to those under 26 in Budget 2014. This is similar to other EU and OECD jurisdictions where such measures feature.

These measures were introduced to protect young people from welfare dependency by providing young jobseekers with a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training or to take up employment. Should a young jobseeker on a reduced jobseeker's allowance payment participate on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment of €160. This rate will be further increased to €193 per week from September 2017. In addition, recipients of jobseekers allowance under 26 years of age who have dependent children are not subject to the reduced rates.

I am committed to ensuring my Department identifies effective measures to incentivise and support young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. The best way to do this is through engagement processes and by incentivising them to avail of educational and training opportunities, thereby enhancing their employment prospects.

The CSO's latest monthly unemployment figures report that the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for persons aged 15-24 years was 11.7% in May 2017. This is a decrease of 3.3 percentage points, from 15% in May 2016.

With effect from March, rates of jobseeker's payments were increased for claimants of all ages as a result of measures introduced in Budget 2017. I have no plans for any further increases in rates at present. Any such changes could only be considered in a budgetary context.

Disability Allowance Appeals

288. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) of the decision to refuse a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30432/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

289. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30433/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This man has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 29 March 2017. The first

payment will be made by his chosen payment method on 5 July 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Review

290. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 42 of 31 May 2017, the stage the review process is at regarding community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30435/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the publication earlier in the year of my Department's Report - *An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme* - the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on Community Employment (CE) as outlined in the reply referred to in your question.

My Department has been consulting with key stakeholders throughout the country during the last month about the changes and it is planned to begin rolling them out in the coming weeks. At the time of publication of the report, it was also signalled that a review of the rules governing the participation of older people on schemes would take place and I expect this review to be completed by early autumn.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

291. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to ensure that rent allowance is not ceased in respect of long-term recipients of the payment until such time as the landlord signs up to the housing assistance payment scheme and it is approved by the local authority; her further plans to ensure that long-term recipients of the rent allowance payment continue to receive their payment in cases in which the landlord is unwilling to sign up to the housing assistance payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30438/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting some 42,300 recipients for which the Government has provided €253 million for in 2017.

The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a key Government priority as outlined in the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland. Under HAP, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance to those with a long-term housing need transfers from my Department to the local authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Rent supplement will continue to be paid to households who are already in the private rented sector but who, generally because of a loss of income through unemployment, require a short term income support to pay their rent.

Persons who are in receipt of rent supplement for over 18 months are being requested to contact their local authority to have their housing needs assessed thus beginning the transfer to HAP. Failure of a landlord to participate in HAP does not affect a recipient's continued entitlement to rent supplement. I can assure the Deputy that every effort is made to ensure that

persons in receipt of rent supplement are supported with a seamless transfer to HAP and entitlement to rent supplement remains in place until HAP is commenced.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Disability Allowance Applications

292. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30465/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The application for disability allowance (DA) from the person in question, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 18 May 2017.

Further evidence was received on 2 June 2017 and this is currently being reviewed by a deciding officer. The person in question can expect a decision on the review of his DA application shortly. If the decision to refuse the allowance is confirmed following review, the person concerned will have the right to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

293. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an oral hearing can be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) who is appealing a disability allowance decision; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30466/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 4 April 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

294. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied). [30469/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady

on 30 March 2017.

On 10 June 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

295. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30470/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from the person concerned for disability allowance (DA) was received by my department on 12 April 2017. The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Private Residential Tenancies Board

296. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if houses which are rented to a local authority under the RAS scheme are exempt from registration (details supplied) with the Residential Tenancies Board, in view of the fact that the guidelines for registration with the RTB state that a dwelling is exempt if it is let by or to a public authority; if a local authority is considered a public body under this exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30369/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 134 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 states that a landlord of a dwelling shall apply to the Residential Tenancies Board to register the tenancy of a dwelling. A 'landlord' is defined in the Act as the person entitled to receive the rent paid in respect of a dwelling by the tenant. Under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), the local authority nominates a RAS recipient to the accommodation who signs a residential tenancy agreement with the landlord. The main "landlord and tenant" relationship remains between the property owner and the RAS tenant. The local authority will be party to this agreement as guarantor of the rent only. The local authority is not the landlord, nor is the property 'let by or to a public authority'. The landlord is the person to whom the local authority pays the rent. Under the 2004 Act, the landlord must register the tenancy with the Residential Tenancies Board.

Social and Affordable Housing

297. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the statutory or legislative definition of affordable housing used by his Department. [30250/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the 1999 Affordable Housing Scheme, which is no longer in operation, eligibility was determined on the basis that applicants were in need of housing and could not afford to purchase a house outright on the open market. The income limits under the 1999 Scheme were revised on a number of occasions and in 2010 the annual income limit for a single income household was €40,000, while the annual limit for a two income household was €100,000, using the formula of 2½ times the main income plus once the secondary income.

Applicants for affordable housing under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 satisfied the income eligibility requirement if the mortgage repayments for suitable accommodation available in the market would exceed 35% of their net income.

The Government recognises the housing affordability pressures in certain areas and is determined to see increases in the supply of high quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent, as quickly as possible, particularly in the major urban areas where demand is greatest. This is one of the issues I will be considering in the context of the recently announced review of Rebuilding Ireland, one year on from its publication, with an emphasis on building on the progress made, strengthening the measures already in place and identifying new initiatives that add value and raise ambition.

As part of the review process, my Department will focus in particular on the broad issue of housing affordability, building on the measures already being advanced. In this context, my Department intends to consult with local authorities and other key stakeholders in the coming weeks, as part of the broader review process.

At a strategic level, under the new 20-year National Planning Framework, there will be an emphasis on managing and utilising State lands to deliver housing and to ensure an active and healthy market for development land. In this regard, an important policy intervention in the delivery of new housing supply under Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland is the development of State-owned lands for mixed-tenure housing, particularly in the major urban areas, where demand is greatest. On 27 April 2017, details of some 2,000 hectares of land in public ownership were published, with the potential to deliver up to 50,000 homes nationally. In practical terms, the development of sites such as these will mean accelerating social housing delivery and securing more homes for sale and rent at lower and more affordable price points.

Rebuilding Ireland also commits to the introduction of an affordable rental scheme to enhance the provision of affordable accommodation for households currently paying a disproportionate amount of disposable income on rent. As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector, this commitment is now to be progressed through kick-starting supply in rent pressure zones. Lands held by local authorities in such zones are to be brought to market on a competitive tendering basis, with a view to leveraging the value of the land to deliver the optimum number of units for rent, and in particular targeting middle-income households, in mixed-tenure developments.

The question of the criteria to apply to determine eligibility for affordable units is currently under consideration.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

298. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of the 10,000 social housing units currently in his Department's plans which have not yet commenced the part 8 process. [30253/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Certain projects listed in the Social Housing Construction Status Report are not subject to the Part 8 process; these include projects being advanced by Approved Housing Bodies and projects by private developers that are being acquired on a turn-key basis by local authorities.

My Department does not have comprehensive information on the Part 8 process in all cases as this is a local authority matter and, in the interests of expediting projects, it is not uncommon for the Part 8 process and my Department's approval process to operate in parallel rather than in sequence. However, based on the information available from the local authorities on their social housing construction projects that have received funding approval-in-principle from my Department, some 300 are subject to the Part 8 process and approximately 180 have completed the process at this stage, with other being progressed by local authorities on an ongoing basis.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

299. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the fire safety certificate and disability access certificate was issued by Dublin City Council for a building (details supplied); when a certificate of compliance was validated by Dublin City Council; the name of the assigned certifier who was on site on 21 June 2017; when the safety file was given to the building owner; the name of the project supervisor at construction stage; if they were on site on 21 June 2017; and if it was legal for homeless persons to be placed in this facility on the night in June when ten families were placed for a single night. [30274/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has overall responsibility for the statutory regulatory framework governing Building Regulations, Building Control and Fire Services. Inspection and enforcement are a matter for local authorities who, under the relevant legislation, are designated as Building Control and Fire Authorities in their respective functional areas and have extensive statutory powers of inspection and enforcement.

A Fire Safety Certificate is a certificate granted by a local Building Control Authority which specifies that the works or building to which the application relates will, if carried out in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, comply with the requirements of Part B of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations. A Fire Safety Certificate is required for certain works to existing buildings, including a material alteration or change of use, to which the requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations apply.

A Disability Access Certificate is a certificate granted by a local Building Control Authority which specifies that the works or building to which the application relates will, if carried out in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, comply with the requirements of Part M of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations. Where a Fire Safety Certificate is required for any works, a Disability Access Certificate is also required.

Fire Safety Certificates, Disability Access Certificates and all other statutory Certificates required pursuant to the Building Regulations and Building Control Regulations are lodged with the appropriate local Building Control Authority and my Department has no involvement in the operational or transactional element of this mandatory statutory requirement.

The information sought by the Deputy may be obtained directly from the relevant local Building Control Authority, Dublin City Council, although some of the information requested

is available on the Building Control Management System online public register – specifically at page number 43 of the Q.2 2017 document at the following web address: https://www.localgov.ie/sites/default/files/building_register_q22017.pdf .

I would like to reaffirm that the paramount priority is and must always be life safety in and about buildings, including the safety and welfare of families placed in emergency accommodation. I have been informed that Dublin City Council met Dublin Fire Services on 21 June 2017 and will be working with them to implement further precautions to enable the particular facility to be utilised on a contingency basis as a harm reduction measure to ensure that families do not have to sleep rough, while the broader refurbishment of the property is completed, allowing it to then serve as supported temporary accommodation for families.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

300. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of the 800 plus families who were in hotel and bed and breakfast emergency accommodation at the end of March 2017 that have been transferred to other forms of emergency accommodation to date in 2017; and the number of the 650 families who were in hotel and bed and breakfast emergency accommodation at the end of May 2017 that will be moved into other forms of emergency accommodation including hubs by the end of July and August 2017. [30275/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At the end of March 2017, there was a total of 871 families accommodated in commercial hotels and B&Bs in the Dublin region. By the end of May, this figure had reduced to approximately 650.

Changes in the number of families in hotels arise on a daily basis as new homeless families present, while others leave. In the two months from March to May 2017, based on figures provided to my Department by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE), 220 of the 381 families presenting as homeless entered hotels, while accommodation solutions were delivered for 605 families - 319 through a programme of family-oriented supported temporary accommodation facilities and 286 through local authority/Approved Housing Body tenancies or the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) homelessness scheme, including 161 families who were prevented from entering hotels. Overall, since the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness was published in July 2016, over 830 families have exited hotels and during the same timeframe, over 400 families were prevented from entering hotels through the HAP scheme.

I am engaging with the Dublin local authorities on an ongoing basis to ensure that the continued reduction in the use of hotels is prioritised. While the emphasis must be on exiting as many as possible of the families in hotels at end-May, I have requested that any remaining families, other than in exceptional circumstances, are notified by end June of the pathway out of hotels envisaged for them. The completion of that work shortly will provide information on the mix of accommodation solutions involved.

Last week, I announced my intention to make available €10 million for further new family-oriented supported temporary accommodation facilities. Currently, fifteen such facilities are being developed at a total estimated cost of €25 million to provide accommodation for upwards of 600 families. The additional funding will add accommodation in such facilities for at least another 200 families.

Departmental Agencies Data

301. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30285/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Tax clearance certificates for all of the State agencies under my Department's remit are fully up-to-date.

Building Regulations

302. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will arrange for a safety audit of all existing apartment and commercial blocks built over the years to the present, with a particular emphasis on those built during the Celtic tiger era from 1994 to 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30299/17]

303. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will arrange for fire safety checks on all lift shafts in apartment and commercial blocks to ensure that they are fully compliant with building fire safety standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30300/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 302 and 303 together.

My Department has overall responsibility for the statutory regulatory framework governing both Building Control and Fire Services. Inspection and enforcement and the maintenance of relevant registers are a matter for local authorities who, under the relevant legislation, are designated as Building Control and Fire Authorities in their respective functional areas and have extensive statutory powers of inspection and enforcement. Section 8(4) of the Building Control Act 1990 provides that a Building Control Authority may serve an Enforcement Notice requiring that such steps as are necessary to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations, including Part B - Fire Safety, be taken within a specified period. An Enforcement Notice may be served at any time up to five years from the completion of the Building Works. Under the Building Control Regulations, Building Control Authorities are required to maintain a register of any enforcement notices served by them, including brief particulars of the contents of the notice, which must be made available for public inspection.

Under the Fire Services Acts of 1981 and 2003 local authorities are designated as fire authorities in their respective functional areas and have extensive statutory powers of inspection and enforcement. Section 20 of the Act provides that the appropriate fire authority may serve a Fire Safety Notice on the owner or occupier of any building which appears to the authority to be a potentially dangerous building. Section 20 of the Act provides that a Fire Safety Notice in relation to a building may prohibit the use of the building, or a specified part of the building, unless or until specified precautions are taken to the satisfaction of the fire authority.

In response to the tragic fire in Grenfell Tower, the immediate focus of attention has been on life safety issues. In that context, I requested that each local authority, as a matter of urgency, 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 in place and fully functional.

In order to raise awareness amongst private landlords, including landlords of households in receipt of social housing supports and rental assistance, the Residential Tenancies Board has been asked to remind all landlords of their statutory responsibilities and obligations as landlords to ensure that their properties fully comply with fire safety requirements. The RTB placed a notice to this effect on its website and will be writing individually to all registered landlords providing detailed information in the coming days.

A Building Control Management System (BCMS) alert was issued to all registered users of the BCMS to remind those involved in works to existing or new buildings of the need to remain vigilant in relation to compliance with the Building Regulations and in particular to Part B Fire Safety. It was issued to 57,000 registered users including builders, assigned certifiers, designers and owners.

I also met with Dublin's Chief Fire Officer 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. A further meeting with all of the national Chief Fire Officers will be convened shortly.

I have tasked the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management with co-ordinating a high-level Task Force to lead Ireland's re-appraisal of fire safety in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire. The further issues to be considered, in addition to those outlined above, include:

- The preliminary survey of the use of cladding products on residential buildings over 18m (6 storeys) being undertaken by fire services in Dublin is to be extended to the rest of the country and to cover buildings in all categories over 18m in height. The results to be reported to my Department by 19 July.

- My Department is to meet with the local authority Chief Fire Officers in the coming weeks to review current activities and to plan for further fire safety initiatives in prioritised areas of action.

- Responsibility for fire safety in buildings of all kinds (other than dwellings) is placed by Section 18 (2) of the Fire Services Act 1981 on the 'person having control' of each building. In order to assist those in both the public and private sector who hold this responsibility, consideration is being given to the publication of a guide on undertaking Fire Safety Assessments as provided for in Section 18 (6)(a) of the Act. This will facilitate persons having control of buildings to demonstrate that they are complying with their statutory responsibilities.

- I will be updating my Cabinet colleagues on the post Grenfell Tower fire situation and highlighting the implications of fire safety responsibilities in buildings across all sectors, both public and private.

- A renewed focus is to be placed on the preparations of local authorities, working with the Principal Response Agencies and others, for large scale evacuation and operation of rest centres under the aegis of the Framework for Major Emergency Management.

- I will consider all issues emerging, including regulatory arrangements, in line with devel-

opments.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

304. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of vacant properties that are being brought back to use under the repair and leasing scheme for each local authority, in tabular form; his views on whether the target of 800 units for 2017 will be achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30327/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant properties across Ireland. The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental property.

In recognition of both the critical demand for units and the potential the RLS has to offer, an additional €26m was assigned to fund the scheme in 2017, which brings the total amount available this year to €32m. This additional investment in 2017 means that delivery under the scheme can be accelerated and up to 800 vacant properties can be brought back into use as new homes for families on local authority waiting lists this year.

Individual targets have been communicated to each local authority to ensure that the objective of 800 units for 2017 is achieved, and local authorities have been provided with delegated authority to enter into contractual arrangements in respect of that number of units. The RLS targets for each local authority are set out in tabular form below.

My Department will be closely monitoring this activity to ensure that the scheme works well; that the funding available is utilised effectively; and ultimately, that new social houses are delivered using the scheme in 2017. If a local authority is in a position to secure more units through the scheme than their target, this is welcomed and funding will be provided accordingly. The RLS has potential to deliver social housing quickly and for low level investment in comparison to new build projects and I expect local authorities, working together with AHBs, will successfully deliver the scheme this year.

2017 RLS Targets per Local Authority

Local Authority	RLS Target 2017
Carlow County Council	14
Cavan County Council	9
Clare County Council	18
Cork City Council	26
Cork County Council	50
Donegal County Council	22
Dublin City Council	150
Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council	25
Fingal County Council	41
Galway City Council	24
Galway County Council	20
Kerry County Council	27
Kildare County Council	31

Local Authority	RLS Target 2017
Kilkenny County Council	13
Laois County Council	13
Leitrim County Council	6
Limerick City and County Council	30
Longford County Council	10
Louth County Council	22
Mayo County Council	20
Meath County Council	18
Monaghan County Council	5
Offaly County Council	13
Roscommon County Council	8
Sligo County Council	10
South Dublin County Council	47
Tipperary County Council	23
Waterford City and County Council	53
Westmeath County Council	20
Wexford County Council	19
Wicklow County Council	13
-	800

Vacant Sites Levy

305. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to impose a vacant site levy on development sites in 2018; the details of the scheme; the rate at which he expects to apply the levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30329/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites, exceeding 0.5 hectares in area - with reduced or zero rates of levy applying in specific circumstances – which, in the planning authority’s opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. The 3% rate of vacant site levy is consistent with the rate applied to derelict sites under the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and is considered reasonable, without being over-punitive, for the purposes of incentivising the activation of such sites for residential or regeneration purposes.

It is also worth noting that all levies due on an individual site will remain a charge on the land concerned until all outstanding levies due are paid. Accordingly, under the vacant site levy provisions, there will be a cumulative effect associated with not activating a site for develop-

ment purposes for each year that a site remains vacant or idle.

The proceeds of the levy raised on vacant sites will be used by planning authorities for the provision of housing and urban regeneration development in the local area in which vacant sites are located. No more than 10% of the levy monies received by planning authorities may be used on their collection and administration costs. At this time, it is not possible to provide an estimate of the annual levies that may be raised by planning authorities in the implementation of the levy.

My Department issued general guidance to planning authorities on the implementation of the vacant site levy in July 2016, by way of Circular Letter PL 7/2016, entitled Implementation of the Vacant Site Levy, which is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/pl_072016_guidance_on_implementation_of_the_vacant_site_levy.pdf.

Planning authorities are presently engaging in the necessary preparatory work, prior to the application of the levy with effect from January 2019 in respect of sites identified on the register in 2018. As required under the Act, this includes the identification of specific vacant sites for entry on the register as well as the registered owners of the sites in question along with undertaking a site valuation. Vacant site registers were established in January 2017 by planning authorities and the registers will be populated as the preparatory work progresses during the year. My Department will monitor the implementation of the levy by local authorities to ensure that it is being fully utilised, in line with its intended purpose.

Departmental Reports

306. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the working group set up by him to report in the second quarter of 2017 on the issue of short-term tourism related lettings has made its report; if so, if he will publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30330/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector requires the establishment of a Working Group to provide clarity in relation to the appropriate regulatory approach, from a planning perspective, for short-term tourism-related lettings to address unintended consequences of short-term lettings, including withdrawal of supply from the rental market.

The Working Group met on 14 June and had a constructive discussion on the subject of appropriate guidance to planning authorities in relation to short-term lettings for tourism purposes. The Group consists of representatives from my Department, the Departments of Finance and of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, An Bord Pleanála, Fáilte Ireland, the Residential Tenancies Board, and Dublin City Council.

The anticipated output of the Group will be a report on the appropriate regulatory approach for short-term tourism-related lettings and the identification of the necessary amendments to legislation required to effect such regulation. It is expected that the report will be finalised in Q3 2017.

In addition to establishing a working group to consider short-term lettings, my Department has been engaging with AirBnB over the last number of months to explore the possibilities for a collaborative agreement, under which practical steps may be put in place to ensure that, where there are risks that short-term letting may result in the removal of significant numbers of proper-

ties from the rental market, planning requirements are respected.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

307. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the expected completion dates for rapid build housing schemes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30331/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under my Department's social housing capital programme, there are over 500 rapid build homes advancing at present. Details in relation to the projects referred to in the Question are set out as follows.

Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot	24 homes, scheduled for delivery July 2017
Mourne Road, Drimnagh	30 homes, scheduled for delivery July 2017
St. Helena's, Finglas	39 homes, scheduled for delivery July 2017
Belcamp, Dublin, 17	38 homes, scheduled for delivery September 2017
Wellview, Mulhuddart	20 homes, scheduled for delivery November 2017
Woodbank, Rathvilly	18 homes, scheduled for delivery end 2017/early 2018
Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot	52 homes, scheduled for delivery end 2017/early 2018
St. Aidan's, Brookfield	71 homes, scheduled for end 2017/early 2018
Pinewood, Balbriggan	24 homes, scheduled for delivery end 2017/early 2018
George's Place, Dun Laoghaire	12 homes, scheduled for delivery in early 2018

My Department has recently asked all Local Authorities to review the social housing projects in their areas and in the interest of achieving earliest delivery, they have been requested to consider their suitability for Design and Build contracts under the Framework set up by the Office Of Government Procurement. They are being asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are amendable to early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

Tenant Purchase Scheme

308. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a review of the tenant incremental purchase scheme has been finalised; if the scheme has been revised to enable residents of Part V housing to purchase their houses from their local authority, especially in view of the fact that the income stream will help local authorities to fund additional housing stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30375/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from

local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

309. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide his Department's targets for social housing completions in 2017 by scheme type (details supplied), in tabular form. [30426/17]

310. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of social housing completions in the first quarter of 2017 by scheme type, in tabular form (details supplied). [30427/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 309 and 310 together.

Details on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities and AHBs, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>. Some of these details are currently being finalised in respect of quarter four of 2016 and will be published shortly, with information on quarter one 2017 to follow thereafter.

My intention is that the delivery of social housing will continued to be accelerated and the target of 21,000 social housing units for 2017 under Rebuilding Ireland will be fully achieved. This target is broken down as follows:

Delivery Method	2017 Targets
Construction	2,284
Refurbishments/Voids	766
Regeneration	150
Acquisitions	1,250
Leasing	600
Rental Accommodation Scheme	1,000
Housing Assistance Payment	15,000
Total	21,050

Housing Assistance Payments Administration

311. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the reason the additional flexibility was utilised by the local authority in only 3% of tenancies in south County Dublin while this was used in 88% of tenancies in the Dublin city local authority in view of the fact that average rents are comparable in both areas and that there are a very limited number of rental vacancies in both areas according to a report (details supplied); and his views on whether this could be an indication that South Dublin County Council is not adequately using flexibility available to it to secure additional tenancies for households eligible for HAP. [30444/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 23,000 households in receipt of HAP, including more than 7,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement. On average in 2017, 330 new households are being supported by HAP each week. The nationwide roll-out of the HAP scheme was completed following its introduction on 1 March 2017 to the Dublin City, Fingal and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Local Authority areas. Eligible households in all 31 Local Authority areas can now avail of the scheme. HAP has been particularly successful in the South Dublin County Council (SDCC) area, where it has been available since 1 October 2014, and currently supports over 1,760 tenancies.

The Government increased the maximum rent limits available under the HAP and Rent Supplement schemes across the country with effect from 1 July 2016. Furthermore, additional flexibility above the existing HAP rent limits was made available to all HAP local authorities from the same date. Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. It is a matter for the local authority, South Dublin County Council in this case, to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis.

The Homeless Pilot of the HAP scheme has been operational since February 2015 across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region, and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The focus of this pilot scheme is to transition qualified households from emergency accommodation, including hotels, into private rented tenancies. Additional discretion of up to 50% above rent limits is available to assist in housing homeless households in the Dublin Region, and 88% of all homeless households have benefited from some level of this homeless specific discretion. The additional discretion available to homeless households recognises the difficulty this cohort of households face in sourcing and securing properties in a highly competitive rental market. This proportion of households utilising discretion in the Dublin City Council administrative area reflects the DRHE's role in processing HAP applications for all eligible homeless households, across the four Dublin local authorities. When homeless households are excluded, the use of discretion of HAP in the Dublin City area is similar to that of SDCC, with 1.2% of all households supported utilising the discretion available.

At the end of Q1 2017, 14.4% of the total number of households across the country being supported by HAP were benefiting from the additional flexibility that was provided to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limits. Excluding homeless households, 9.6% of all households being supported were benefiting from the additional flexibility and in those cases the average rate of discretionary payment being used was 14.3% above rent limits provided.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. I am satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland.

Departmental Agencies Data

312. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if all agencies under his aegis have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the agencies which do not have an up to date tax clearance certificate; the reason they do not have a tax clearance certificate in each case, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30283/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The only State body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. As the Army Pensions Board does not have its own budget, all expenditure and financial transactions relating to it are administered by my Department through the Army Pensions Vote, Vote 35. Consequently the Board is not required to have a tax clearance certificate.

Defence Forces Recruitment

313. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if persons with asthma are barred from joining or serving in the Army; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30366/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Service in the Defence Forces is a demanding career which places unique physical and psychological demands on individuals, exposing them to a unique range of challenging environments. In these circumstances it is vital that the health profile of personnel be such as to ensure that operational capability and effectiveness are not compromised. There are a number of physical and medical standards laid down in the Defence Force Regulations and associated Administrative Instructions. These requirements are based on the professional advice of the Medical Branch and having regard to the nature of the job, the duties of military service and the training exercises undertaken by members of the Defence Forces.

The Director of the Medical Branch has advised that applicants who have chronic medical conditions are at a higher risk of suffering from symptoms related to those conditions due to the exigencies of military service. Entry criteria for enlistment to the Permanent Defence Force are, therefore, based on the selection of personnel who are not likely to require medical support and whose pre-existing medical status could not reasonably be foreseen to be subject to aggravation by service with the Permanent Defence Force.

Each individual's medical condition is examined taking into account a detailed/documented history of the condition and its extent, including remissions, exacerbations, and any other associated conditions. In the specific context of a chronic medical condition such as asthma the sufferer is placed at a higher health risk. Accordingly, an applicant who is suffering from Asthma would be found to be below Defence Forces Medical Standards and would therefore be ineligible to enlist in the Defence Forces as a Recruit or Cadet.

If a serving member developed a sthma after induction to the Defence Forces, he/she would not be found to be below Defence Forces Medical Standards, unless very severe, but would be given a Medical Classification Code reflective of a chronic but intermittent medical condition.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

314. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of cases of malaria in Defence Forces personnel serving in sub Saharan Africa; and the anti malarial drug that the members involved had been prescribed at the time of contracting malaria, in each of the years 2015 and 2016. [30467/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Military Authorities. I will revert to the Deputy when the information is available.

28 June 2017