

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 13, inclusive, answered orally.

Schools Building Projects Status

14. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps that will be taken to ensure that there are no further unnecessary delays in the expected timescale for the construction and completion of phase two of a college (details supplied). [31725/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers will provide permanent accommodation to cater for the full projected enrolment of 1000 pupils including a Special Needs Unit, a Sports Hall with fitness suite and changing facilities and ancillary accommodation and a school library.

My Department approved the project to proceed to Tender Stage in October 2016. Pre-qualification of contractors for this project had first been conducted by the design team in April 2015. Due to the passage of time since then the design team was concerned about the possibility of legal challenges at tender stage and sought advice from the Office of Government Procurement on the matter. The advice was that it would be prudent to run the pre-qualification process again. My Department concurred with this advice and requested the Design Team to conduct a second pre-qualification process.

The pre-qualification process was concluded earlier this month and Invitations to Tender issued to 6 qualified contractors on 9 June 2017. As a result of a technical issue which has emerged in recent days, relating to holidays in Northern Ireland and the fact that 4 of the 6 preferred tenderers are based in Northern Ireland, the deadline for return of tenders will be extended by two weeks to 28 July.

However, this will result in no change to the overall target for delivery of this project as the design team will be instructed to make up this two weeks in the period of processing and assessing the tender.

Subject to no further issues arising it is now anticipated that construction will commence in late 2017 and the project is, as previously advised, expected to take approximately 18 months to complete.

Apprenticeship Programmes

15. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the

implementation of the action plan to expand apprenticeship and traineeships in Ireland 2016 to 2020. [31570/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In January this year we launched the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, which sets out how state agencies, education and training providers and employers will work together to deliver on the Action Plan for Education commitments on the expansion of apprenticeship and traineeship in the period.

Last year we saw the first of the new apprenticeships developed by the Apprenticeship Council with the launch of the Insurance Practitioner and the Industrial Electrical Engineer apprenticeships. Last month three further new apprenticeships got underway, two in the medical devices area and a polymer processing apprenticeship. Subject to successful validation, a further ten programmes are scheduled to get underway later this year in various sectors including hospitality, accounting and financial services.

A key commitment set out in the Plan for this year was the issuing of a second call for proposals to refresh the pipeline of proposals already established through the first call. The second call issued on 4 May and will remain open until 1 September.

As well as developments in new apprenticeships, registrations in the craft trades are rising as the employment and economic situation improves. In 2016 there were 3,742 registrations which represents a significant recovery since the crash. This year the upward trend continues with registrations at the end of June of 2,200 which is almost 40% ahead of the same period in 2016. Registrations in the craft trades are predicted to grow to 5,587 over the period to 2020.

A steering group, chaired by SOLAS with representatives from all key stakeholders, has recently been established to examine ways of relaunching existing traineeships and also developing new career traineeships. To date six new traineeships have been developed.

A lot has been learned in the expansion project and I am confident that we now have a clear process with strong governance to allow the efficient development of new apprenticeships and traineeships.

Land Acquisition

16. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received a response from the Christian Brothers regarding the playing pitches at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31797/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has written to the Congregation in response to its correspondence on the matter of the Clonkeen lands, seeking clarification on a number of points including whether the land in question is, as advised, the subject of a legally binding agreement with a home builder.

The Congregation have acknowledged the correspondence concerned and indicated that it would be in further contact with my Department before the end on June. My officials have since written further to the Congregation seeking an early response.

Teacher Training Provision

17. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the existing or

planned measures to ensure that primary school teachers are sufficiently trained to deal with mental health issues that may arise with regard to their pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31701/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting the work of schools in promoting positive mental health. The process spans the curriculum in schools, whole school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care and the provision of professional support for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally.

All primary initial teacher education programmes include psychology of education, sociology of education and curricular studies including the implementation of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum which is taught at all class levels. The SPHE curriculum provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, well-being, and social and emotional health of the individual child.

To support schools, my Department has produced and distributed the *Well-Being in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (2015). These guidelines are informed by consultation with key Education and Health partners, and by current research. They assist schools and the school community in (a) supporting and responding to the mental health and well-being needs of our children and (b) in providing a safe and supportive environment for building life skills and resilience and a strong sense of connectedness to school. My Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is actively assisting schools and school communities in this regard.

Professional development services are provided by my Department to support teachers in addressing and dealing with mental health issues. These services provide support across a continuum: from whole-school and classroom level, to support for some children and support for a few children. At primary level, continuing professional development is provided through:

- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) which provides guidance for schools in managing and responding to critical incidents; and training in the delivery by teachers of programmes, including the *Incredible Years* programme, which aims to prevent and treat young children's behaviour problems and promote their social, emotional, and academic competence;

- The Professional Development Service for Teachers provides professional development support to teachers and schools to develop and promote student health and well-being, including mental health, in the context of a positive health promoting school environment. In 2016, there were 8, 535 CPD engagements with teachers in this area through seminars, workshops and in school support;

- The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Support Service, will support teachers in addressing the needs of pupils with special educational needs, including needs which relate to their mental health;

- Supports are also provided through the Association of Teachers' Education Centres in Ireland (ATECI) summer courses, the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN), the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and the Centre for School Leadership.

A key theme of my Department's 2017 Action Plan for Education is the support of well-being initiatives to ensure that mental resilience and personal well-being are integral parts of the education and training system. Specifically, the Plan commits to the commencement of the

roll-out of the Friends for Life programme and the Incredible Years Classroom Management programme to teachers in all DEIS schools. NEPS will deliver both programmes commencing in the autumn and are currently in the process of recruiting an additional 11 psychologist staff to undertake this work.

It is planned that during the coming academic year, some 40 Friends programmes will be organised involving some 1,000 primary and post-primary teachers and 50 Incredible Years programmes will be offered to some 1,000 primary school teachers at the commencement of a three year roll-out of the training.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

18. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the commitment in the programme for Government to establish a new in school speech and language service to support young children; his Department's engagement with the HSE to develop a plan for the implementation of this commitment; the details of the review and audit carried out by the HSE to facilitate the implementation of this plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31801/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for a Partnership Government states that a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy will be established. It also contains a commitment to examine the adequacy of the present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties and early intervention.

As Speech and Language Therapists are currently employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE), officials at my Department are engaging with colleagues in the Department of Health and the HSE to review the existing level of Speech and language therapy provision and to conduct an audit of services nationally.

The review is being overseen by the Interdepartmental Cross Sectoral team which has a role to coordinate and integrate the provision of health and educational services.

At the Cross-Sectoral Team meeting of 24 May last, the HSE informed the group that it has reviewed the provision of Speech and Language Therapy services and that the report of the national group was completed at the end of March.

The report is currently being considered by the National Directors for Primary Care and for Social Care and it is expected that this report will be circulated as soon as possible thereafter.

The review of existing services will guide the implementation of the Programme for Government commitment.

Pending the development of any new speech and language therapy delivery model my Department continues to provide an extensive range of supports for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD), through the provision of special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools, and through additional Special Educational Needs teaching supports provided to all schools.

Language Schools

19. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has

been drawn to the fact that persons in the English language teaching sector experience abuses (details supplied). [31628/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of English language schools in Ireland are privately run. The relationship between teachers and private providers of education is based on a private contract. Issues relating to working conditions are a matter between the two parties and do not come under the remit of my Department.

There is an extensive range of legislation in Ireland which protects the employment rights of workers, including English language teachers, in relation to employment contracts, payment of wages and related matters. It is the responsibility of the employer in the first instance to ensure that their employees receive their employment rights. Where an employee considers that their rights have been breached they may bring a claim under the appropriate legislation to the Workplace Relations Commission. The Workplace Relations Commission is also responsible for monitoring a range of employment rights through its Inspection Service.

A core component of the Government's future policy for the English language sector will be the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM). 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 necessary legislation to facilitate the introduction of the IEM is being progressed by my Department. This legislation will also provide Quality and Qualifications Ireland, who will manage the IEM, with additional powers to examine the bona fides of providers, including English language providers.

European Globalisation Fund

20. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the government held negotiations with the EU to reduce the eligibility criteria for EU cohesion funding in order that small businesses can avail of this funding when making persons redundant. [30502/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) assists Member States to provide active labour market supports to workers made redundant as a result of globalisation or due to a global financial and economic crisis. The Fund stands outside the EU multiannual financial framework and the Cohesion Fund, drawing from savings across the EU budget, subject to a maximum annual amount of €150m.

To be eligible for assistance there must be at least 500 redundancies in a specific company (including suppliers/downstream producers) in a 4 month period, or at least 500 redundancies in a specific sector in a 9 month period. The threshold number of redundancies was originally set at 1,000, however this was reduced to the current 500 threshold as part of EU Member States negotiations on revisions to the EGF in 2009.

Under the current EGF Regulation, workers made redundant from small companies can be included in EGF programmes in a number of ways.

Company specific EGF applications can include small businesses and self-employed persons whose activity has ceased, provided that it can be demonstrated that their activity was dependent on the specific company concerned (i.e. they were a supplier or downstream producer of the company). Sectoral EGF applications can include small businesses and self-employed

persons who were operating in the relevant economic sector.

In small labour markets or in exceptional circumstances, applications can be made where the minimum threshold number of redundancies is not entirely met and the Member State can substantiate that there is a serious impact on employment and the local, regional or national economy. Cases approved on exceptional circumstances grounds cannot exceed 15% of the total EGF annual budget. A number of Irish EGF applications have been approved on exceptional circumstances grounds.

Land Acquisition

21. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will make a formal offer to the Christian Brothers to hand over the playing pitches at a school (details supplied) in lieu of some of the moneys owed to the redress board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31798/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Decisions in regard to the disposal of these lands are a matter for the Congregation. I would expect the Congregation to have given very careful consideration to all relevant issues, including the education needs of the current and future students of Clonkeen College. The Congregation has also to balance that need with the need to complete its outstanding redress contribution. After the publication of the Ryan report, the Congregation pledged to make a cash contribution of €30 million to a fund to aid survivors of abuse and have contributed €21.2 million to date. The monies are paid into a fund to aid survivors, a lot of whom are advancing in years and require services supplemental to what the State can offer.

I am not privy to the deliberations or to the debates within the Congregation that led to their decision to sell off these lands for property development. I would be reasonably confident that there are other assets the Congregation could dispose of to realise its remaining redress contribution.

The Congregation has recently written to me in regard to the wider issue of the transfer of ownership of its playing fields to the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). Proposals in regard to its playing fields had been made to the Government in 2009 and counterproposals were made which were not accepted by the Congregation or ERST to which the playing fields are, I understand, currently licensed. The Congregation has indicated its willingness to engage further with my Department on how such a transfer would be reckoned as a redress contribution.

My Department has written to the Congregation on the matter of the Clonkeen lands, seeking clarification on a number of points including whether the land in question is now the subject of a legally binding agreement with a builder.

The Congregation have acknowledged the correspondence and will be in further touch with my Department.

School Admissions

22. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will bring forward the legislation to allow for equal access for all children to schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31578/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Earlier this year I ran a

public consultation process and held a Forum on the role of religion in school admissions.

Under the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, which last week passed committee stage, schools which are not oversubscribed will have to accept all applicants. This means that religion will not be used in admissions to 80% of schools.

It is in the 20% other schools that this issue now needs to be addressed.

My preference is to remove the capacity for state-funded denominational primary schools, where they are oversubscribed, to use religion as a criteria in admissions process except, in three scenarios:

- where it would not otherwise be possible to maintain the ethos of the school;
- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to ensure that students of that religion can find a school place in a school of that ethos;
- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to admit a student of that religion who resides in a community consistently served by that school.

As I have said recently, my intention is to introduce more detailed proposals on this in the autumn, with a view to having them enacted by the end of 2017, depending on the process in the Oireachtas.

Skills Shortages

23. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his contingency plans to deal with the ongoing shortage of adequately trained chefs across the State; the recruitment or training initiatives he plans to introduce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29959/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): In 2015 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGSFN) conducted a study on the future skills needs of the hospitality sector including skill needs for chefs and cooks.

The report of the study provides a set of recommendations designed to address the needs of the sector to 2020, including the need to establish a National Oversight and Advisory Group, comprising of key hospitality stakeholders, to provide a forum for on-going collaboration to support the needs of the sector and oversee implementation of the EGFSN recommendations.

Established last year, the group will shortly publish an interim progress report, including information on hospitality provision, indicating that over 6,100 people were enrolled on hospitality related courses in 2016, of which 2,464 people were on courses training chefs and cooks.

Arising from Government's commitment to expand apprenticeship and traineeship education, a new Commis Chef Apprenticeship, led by the Irish Hotels Federation and the Restaurants Association of Ireland working with Kerry ETB is planned to commence later this year with over 120 enrolments. Work is also under way on a suite of chef apprenticeship programmes, including chef de partie, sous chef and executive chef to supplement the commis chef programme.

A new career traineeship programme was initiated in 2015 by SOLAS in collaboration with the ETBs and enterprise to develop more effective models of work-based learning, primarily at NFQ levels 4 and 5, incorporating best national and international research and practice. To date five programmes have been completed in Hospitality with a further nine planned for this year.

A Restaurant and Hospitality Skillnet was established earlier this year and along with the Taste 4 Success Skillnet, will address skill needs in the sector.

The NCCA has recently published a draft new specification for Junior Certificate Home Economics with a strong emphasis on culinary skills.

Finally, the National Skills Council and nine Regional Skills Fora were established in April and will along with Government Departments and agencies monitor provision for all sectors, including hospitality.

Student Support Schemes

24. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to invest in third level mental health counselling; his further plans to ring-fence €3 million for student counselling and supports per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31574/17]

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.

Student services and associated activities are an integral part of the whole student experience 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.

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 and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

Special Educational Needs Data

25. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the level of special needs and ASD places at secondary level in the Newbridge area of County Kildare in view of the number of students at primary school due to move to secondary school in which a similar level of supports are not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31733/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools. Special classes offer a supportive learning environment to students with ASD who are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream class, even with support, for most or all of their school day. Special classes are for students who have a recommendation for a special class placement in their professional reports.

With regard to Kildare in particular there are 942 students with ASD attending schools in the

County. Of these, 520 students attend mainstream schools and are accessing in-school supports including Resource teaching and SNA support.

322 students are attending 59 ASD special classes, including 6 early intervention classes, 41 primary ASD classes and 12 post primary ASD classes. A further 100 students with ASD are placed in 4 special schools. The number of ASD classes has increased in the area by 24% since the 2013/14 school year.

The NCSE intend to open an additional 4 special classes in Kildare for the 2017/18 school year, consisting of 1 Primary ASD special class, 2 Post Primary ASD special classes and 1 Post Primary Moderate GLD special class.

The NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there will be sufficient special class placements available to meet demand in Kildare for the forthcoming school year.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

During the passage of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill in the Select Committee last week I indicated that I intend, at Report Stage, to include in this Bill a provision that will provide, based on reports and advice from the NCSE, the Minister will have the power to require a school to open a special class or increase the number of special classes in schools identified by the NCSE. Because this power will require a school to provide land or alter existing property I am of the view that the power should be with the Minister who can engage the patron or trustees and that there should be adequate safeguards to ensure people's rights are protected.

Special Educational Needs Staff

26. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the implementation of the new resource allocation model and the processing of appeals by schools. [31569/17]

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

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

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

The new model provides one single allocation to schools based on the profile. Schools will be front-loaded with resources to provide additional teaching support to all pupils who need such support.

The NCSE notified all schools of their special education teaching allocations for September 2017 on 7 March 2017.

The NCSE also published details of the appeals process on the NCSE website: www.ncse.ie.

Schools who wished to submit an appeal were asked to do so by March 31 2017.

Schools could appeal whether the data used to calculate their school profile was correct and complete and whether it was correctly applied in the calculation of their 2017/18 allocation.

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

In advance of any submission of an appeal, schools were asked to read carefully the DES Circulars and in particular the relevant sections, which relate to the breakdown of the allocation, which may be under consideration for appeal.

The NCSE is now concluding the appeal process and it is hoped that decisions will issue to schools in the coming days.

The model will also allow for some additional provision for exceptional circumstances or where a school's enrolment levels increase very substantially prior to the next review of the model.

It is acknowledged that there are circumstances which may arise in schools, which fall outside the appeals process put in place by the NCSE in March 2017 (NCSE 03/2017) to support the new special education teaching model. This includes circumstances where the school profile significantly changes following the allocation process e.g. a developing school where the net enrolment numbers significantly increase year on year.

Schools have recently been advised of the qualifying criteria for such allocations. Schools who qualify for additional allocations on the grounds that they will receive additional developing posts in accordance with the primary and post primary staffing schedules for 2017, will also provisionally receive additional special education teaching allocations, less any retained element contained within their profiled allocation.

Schools which have qualified for additional allocations on the grounds of developing status will be notified of these allocations.

The National Council for Special Education will support schools in managing their special education teaching allocations in the first instance. Only in very exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the schools profile has changed very significantly since the allocation was made to the school, may an additional allocation of hours be made to the school.

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

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

School Accommodation Provision

27. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the provision of additional accommodation for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31681/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional school accommodation. The application will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

School Admissions

28. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the work which needs to be carried out before he is ready to finalise a legislative proposal regarding the role of religion in school admissions. [31747/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, earlier this year, I ran a public consultation process on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes, to which I received almost 1,000 submissions.

On Monday 29 May 2017 I held a public Forum on the role of religion in primary school admissions, which was attended by over 120 individuals.

Under the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, which last week passed committee stage, schools which are not oversubscribed will have to accept all applicants. This means that religion will not be used in admissions to 80% of schools, and in fact this is already the practice in most schools.

It is in the 20% other schools that this issue now needs to be addressed. My preference is to remove the capacity for state-funded denominational primary schools, where they are oversubscribed, to use religion as a criteria in admissions process except, in three scenarios:

- where it would not otherwise be possible to maintain the ethos of the school;
- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to ensure that students of that religion can find a school place in a school of that ethos;
- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to admit a student of that religion who resides in a community consistently served by that school.

As I have said recently, my intention is to introduce more detailed proposals on this in the autumn, with a view to having them enacted by the end of 2017, depending on the process in the Oireachtas.

Schools Site Acquisitions

29. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made regarding the purchase of a site for the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; if his Department has made offers to landowners regarding a site; when a site is expected to be purchased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31566/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana is included on my Department's capital programme.

A preferred site option has been identified and officials from Donegal County Council, on behalf of my Department, have engaged in discussions with the landowner in question with a view to its acquisition, including on potential costs of acquisition. These discussions are progressing subject to clarification on some technical details which are currently under consideration.

Due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to provide any further information at this time. I can assure the Deputy that all parties are working to progress this process to a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects

30. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to the need for new buildings for schools in the Curragh, in view of the condition of facilities available to pupils there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31734/17]

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

While my Department is aware that some consideration is being given locally to applying for replacement accommodation for the Curragh primary schools, no proposal in this regard has been received.

I can confirm that the post-primary school has recently submitted an application for temporary accommodation. My Department will consider the application and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

Additional post-primary capacity is currently being provided in Newbridge and my Department will continue to monitor demographics to identify where additional school places will be required nationally, including in County Kildare.

Departmental Properties

31. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review all school lands and examine the way in which to protect the lands for the use of schools into the future, in view of recent issues that have arisen with regard to the sale of lands at schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31799/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Ireland's school system is based on the principle of patronage. The school patron is responsible for running the school and commonly arrangements to provide land for the school were made by the patron. Most school property is in the ownership of private entities.

Where the ownership of school property rests with the patron or trustees, it is a matter for school patrons to ensure that the current and potential future educational needs of the school

are prioritised.

School Transport Appeals

32. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress on the review of school transport appeals. [31567/17]

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

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

The Programme for Government commits to a review of the criteria and guidelines for the School Transport Appeals Board. The review is underway and is expected to be completed shortly.

Language Schools Accreditation

33. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether English language teachers will be crucial to the expected 25% growth of international students in the next four years; his further views on whether these jobs must be quality jobs; and his plans to include minimum employment conditions for English language teachers in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. [31627/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016 – 2020 contains a commitment to increase the number of students in the high quality English language sector by 25% by the end of the 2019/2020 academic year. A core component of the Government's strategy for achieving this target will be the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM).

The IEM will provide a full quality framework for the provision of education to international learners in the future. The IEM will be managed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and only those high quality institutions that meet the robust quality assurance procedures of QQI will be allowed to carry the Mark. 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 necessary legislation to facilitate the introduction of the IEM is being progressed by my Department. This legislation 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.

State Examinations

34. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the implementation of the new reasonable accommodation scheme for exam pupils; and the guidelines provided to schools to assess eligibility under the scheme. [31568/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. The Commission in this regard operates a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations.

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Ministerial Functions

35. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the responsibilities of the newly created role of the Minister of State with responsibility for higher education; and the way in which it integrates with the existing role of the Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation and with his Department and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. [29463/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The relevant delegation orders required on foot of the appointments of Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. as Minister of State for Higher Education and John Halligan T.D. as Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation are currently being drafted and will be brought before Cabinet shortly. The delegation orders will define and clarify the respective roles and responsibilities on each Minister of State.

DEIS Administration

36. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will confirm his commitment to keeping so-called legacy posts in place in DEIS schools in the most disadvantaged areas. [31745/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following the launch of the DEIS Plan 2017, I made it clear that schools currently participating in the DEIS programme would continue to receive the same level of supports under the School Support Programme for the 2017/18 school year. This includes no change to the current situation regarding posts allocated under previous educational disadvantage schemes in DEIS schools (known as 'legacy posts') subject to the usual arrangements which apply in relation to staffing allocations.

DEIS Plan 2017 continues to provide the same Staffing Schedule, of 20:1 in Junior and 24:1 in senior classes, for schools with the highest levels of disadvantage. A range of factors contribute to determining the staffing allocation for individual schools including changes to pupil enrolment. As the teaching allocation to schools, including legacy posts, is enrolment based, this determines whether schools gain or lose teaching posts from year to year. Schools are very familiar with the Staffing Schedule process and know that fluctuations in enrolment may impact on staffing allocation year on year.

A central aim of the DEIS Plan is to use available resources for maximum impact, in schools where there are high concentrations of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage. As part of an overall goal of ensuring that additional resources are correctly matched to identified need, there are a number of specific actions in DEIS Plan 2017 to ensure that the optimal level of teaching resources is established as part of the DEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

Pending the outcome of this work, which will inform future provision in this area, it would not be appropriate for me to make any commitment in relation to the staffing of DEIS schools.

Apprenticeship Programmes

37. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the imposition of the pro rata student contribution fee for apprentices is a barrier to accessing apprenticeships, in view of the commitment in the programme for Government to double the number of apprenticeships; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31796/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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.

As the employment and economic situation improves we continue to see strong growth in apprenticeship registrations. At the end 2015, registrations were up 17% compared to the same period in 2014. The upward trend continues with registrations at the end of 2016 of 3,821 a further 20% increase on 2015 registrations.

Teachers' Remuneration

38. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on reducing the pay scale equality gap affecting recently qualified teachers. [31744/17]

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

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

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreements have, to date, restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substan-

tial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and for apprenticeships.

As a result of these changes and taking into account the proposed pay measures under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the starting salary of a new teacher from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. If full equalisation was achieved the starting salary for a post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 would be €43,879 and for a primary teacher would be €41,511.

Further to the this newly recruited teachers benefit from the terms of the Ward circular which reduced the qualifying period for a CID and the removal of the career break and secondment categories of objective grounds which had previously prevented some teachers from gaining CIDs. In addition to earlier permanency, other measures of benefit to newly recruited teachers include a revised sequence for the filling of posts to enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more quickly and easier than before.

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

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

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectoral issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Accordingly, the recently concluded draft Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 includes a provision in relation to new entrants which states that an examination of the remaining salary scale issues in respect of post January 2011 recruits at entry grades covered by parties to the Agreement will be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

School Patronage

39. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to research by Trinity College on religious education which found young students do not want to be separated from each other according to faith; his views on the effects of this practice; the policy initiatives his Department has to deal with this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31564/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the research on Community National Schools, carried out by Trinity College Dublin, to which the Deputy

refers.

Community National Schools are multi-denominational schools which provide for belief nurturing during the school day. They aim to accommodate parents who wish to have their children learn about different faiths and beliefs while at the same time nurturing children in their own beliefs. Community National Schools are committed to excellence in education, inclusion and valuing every member of the school community.

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

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

As noted in the research, the manner in which Community National Schools deliver belief-specific teaching in Junior Infants to second class is evolving. The majority of CNS schools no longer group children according to their beliefs for a four week period each year, and instead all of the children learn about different religions and beliefs together. I see merit in this approach.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is to commence a review of the patron’s programme in Community National Schools for Junior Infants to second class, starting in September 2017. I look forward to seeing the outcome of the review.

Teachers’ Remuneration

40. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the status of equal pay for equal work for teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26044/17]

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

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

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

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School Accommodation ProvisionS

41. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase provision of second level education in the eastern part of County Meath, in particular, the Duleek area. [31746/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): To assist in identifying where additional school accommodation is needed, my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to examine where the pressure for school places across the country will

arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and school enrolment returns. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic analyses at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. Duleek is located in the Drogheda school planning area in which there are 27 primary schools and 7 post-primary schools.

As the Deputy may be aware, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school, Ballymakenny College, opened in the Drogheda school planning area in 2014. Two new post-primary schools also opened in County Meath, Colaiste na Mí, Navan in 2013 and De Lacy, College, Ashbourne, in 2014, both of which will cater for 1,000 pupils each. In addition, Beaufort College, Navan will be expanding to 870 pupils and a building project for this extension is currently under construction.

My Department is keeping all school planning areas under review to take account of updated child benefit data, enrolment data and also the impact of existing and planned capacity increases in the Drogheda school planning area and adjoining school planning areas.

Schools Building Projects Status

42. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will prioritise the development of a new school (details supplied) in the interest of staff and pupils; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31576/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware from Deputy Phelan's answer to her last week of the current status of this project.

The Stage 2(b) Detailed Design Report was recently submitted to my Department by the Board of Management and its Design Team. Following receipt of that submission, my Department authorised the Board of Management to instruct its Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process for the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered. This authorisation was granted by my Department in order to expedite the tender process for this project by running the pre-qualification in tandem with the finalisation of Stage 2(b). The Design Team has commenced this process and the closing date for the e-tenders advertisement was 19 June 2017. The Design Team has informed my Department that it expects to complete its assessment of the pre-qualification submissions in the coming weeks and will then submit its report on the shortlist of contractors to my Department.

Following examination of the Stage 2(b) Report, it became apparent that the submission was incomplete and some additional items which should have been included in the original submission, were requested by my Department. A revised submission has been received which is currently under review. Upon completion of the review of the revised 2(b) submission my Department will immediately revert to the school with a timeframe to proceed to tender and construction stage.

The Stage 2(b) submission is an extremely vital part in the design process and is the final stage prior to the seeking of tenders for the construction of the school building.

Physical Education Facilities

43. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the funding of indoor spaces for physical education in a primary school (details supplied) [31771/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has no record of receiving an application from the school in question relating to the matter to which he refers.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department provided significant capital funding to the school for the construction of 4 mainstream classrooms and resource rooms under my Department's prefab replacement initiative and this building project was completed in 2014.

The Deputy will also be aware 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 of necessity, be prioritised for this purpose and to provide mainstream classroom accommodation where additional teachers are being appointed.

School Accommodation Provision

44. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the ability of his Department to meet the full requirements in terms of new school buildings and the upgrading of facilities at existing news at primary and second level in all areas throughout the country with particular reference to demographic pressure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31752/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. My Department is currently in the process of completing demographic exercises nationwide. This process is detailed and rigorous and will take some time to complete. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

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

Third Level Admissions Data

45. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his projections for growth in higher education student numbers over the next decade; the way in which he proposes that demand will be met; the projected costings involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31572/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is currently forecasting an increase of the order of 25% in full time student demand in DES aided third level institutions between 2015 – 2029.

The need for the additional funding for the Higher Education sector to address these demographic and other pressures was clearly identified in the report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education which was published in 2016.

The Expert Group report sets out a number of funding options for the sector. I referred the Expert Group report to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills for its consideration and in order to build political consensus on the most appropriate sustainable future funding model for higher education. I look forward to receiving the recommendations from the Joint Committee once they have concluded their consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

Following the publication of the Expert Group's report, I took immediate steps to increase funding for higher education to address, inter alia, rising demographics, with an additional €36.5 million being secured in 2017.

Provision is also being made in the Department's expenditure ceiling in 2018 and 2019 for further investment and, cumulatively, in the period 2017 – 2019, this represents an additional €160 million Exchequer investment in higher education. Elements of this multi-annual funding provision will continue to be directed at meeting the costs of demographic increases.

In addition, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are currently exploring the potential for a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training. The proposal under consultation seeks to deliver up to an additional €200m per annum by 2020 through an increase in the National Training Fund levy.

In addition, the HEA is undertaking a review of the model for allocating recurrent grant funding to universities, institutes of technology and colleges. This will ensure that the model by which funding is allocated to our Higher Education Institutes is as efficient, effective and responsive as possible.

School Admissions

46. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the way in which ending religious discrimination in school admissions can be achieved; his further views on changes to the way in which religious instruction is taught to ensure there is no religious discrimination in the course of a school day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31795/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, earlier this year, I ran a public consultation process on the role of denominational religion in the school admission process and possible approaches for making changes, to which I received almost 1,000 submissions.

On Monday 29 May 2017 I held a public Forum on the role of religion in primary school admissions, which was attended by over 120 individuals.

Under the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, which last week passed committee stage, schools which are not oversubscribed will have to accept all applicants. This means that religion will not be used in admissions to 80% of schools, and in fact this is already the practice in

most schools.

It is in the 20% other schools that this issue now needs to be addressed. My preference is to remove the capacity for state-funded denominational primary schools, where they are oversubscribed, to use religion as a criteria in admissions process except, in three scenarios:

- where it would not otherwise be possible to maintain the ethos of the school;
- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to ensure that students of that religion can find a school place in a school of that ethos;
- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to admit a student of that religion who resides in a community consistently served by that school.

As I have said recently, my intention is to introduce more detailed proposals on this in the autumn, with a view to having them enacted by the end of 2017, depending on the process in the Oireachtas.

With regard to attending religious instruction, under the Constitution children have a right to attend school without attending religious instruction. Parents therefore have a right to have their children opt out of religion classes and it is expected that this right will be upheld by schools on foot of a parental request. This applies at both primary and post primary levels.

The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill includes a specific requirement that school enrolment policies must include details of the school's arrangements for any students who do not wish to attend religious instruction. This is an important measure which will help ensure transparency from the outset as to how a school will uphold the rights of parents in this regard.

In terms of the practical arrangements by which schools ensure that the right to opt out of religion classes is accommodated, these are a matter for each individual school.

I am aware that on occasion there can be practical issues around supervision and arranging class times and these have to be considered by schools at local level and worked through in a pragmatic way. Circumstances vary from school to school and from primary to post-primary. The precise nature of the arrangements therefore have to be considered by each school having regards to the particular circumstances in question including factors such as the numbers of children involved, the ages of those children and the availability of staff and physical space in the school concerned.

The Catholic Schools Partnership developed in 2015 a resource for Catholic schools entitled 'Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils'. It gives suggestions on developing policies and sharing best practice with regard to inclusion of all pupils and gives practical suggestions to schools in how to engage positively in inter-cultural dialogue.

In my view, the best way of dealing with this matter to the satisfaction of whole school community is by schools communicating with parents to ascertain what their wishes are in this regard. As the Deputy may be aware, a key aspect of the Parents and Students Charter Bill concerns how schools communicate with parents and this may provide a more appropriate opportunity for dealing with this particular issue.

Schools Building Projects Status

47. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there have been

further delays regarding the development of a school (details supplied); the way in which these delays can be managed to ensure the school is still ready for September 2018 in view of the significant delays already experienced by the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31626/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, earlier this week, my Department gave approval to Westmeath County Council to issue a letter of intent to award a contract for the project to which he refers. Subject to there being no issues with the preferred bidder complying with the terms of the letter of intent, the project should commence on site shortly. The contract for the project is 12 months and it is envisaged that the building should be completed for September 2018.

Special Educational Needs

48. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the commitments in the programme for Government to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. [29820/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As committed to in the Programme for a Partnership Government, I am examining the adequacy of the present policies and provision in relation to people with disabilities, and their scope for improvement .

In doing so, I will take into account the recommendations contained in the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice papers.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits that we will invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychological Service to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children and teenagers and to offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents. The Programme commits to bring the total number of NEPS psychologists to 238 from the current sanctioned limit of 173. A recruitment process is currently underway to bring the numbers of NEPS Psychologists to currently approved numbers.

The Programme also includes a commitment to introduce a new in-school Speech and Language Therapy service, creating stronger linkages between parents, teachers and Speech and Language Therapists. The programme also commits to bring the number of Speech and Language Therapists up to 1,102 (a 25% increase).

As Speech and Language Therapists are currently employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE), officials at my Department are currently engaging with colleagues in the Department of Health and the HSE to review the existing level of Speech and language therapy provision and to conduct an audit of services nationally. The review of existing services will guide the implementation of the Programme for Government commitment.

In line with the recommendations of the Focussed Policy Assessment of the SNA Scheme in 2016, the Government decided to proceed with a comprehensive assessment of the SNA Scheme, currently being undertaken by the NCSE, in consultation with other Departments and State Agencies, including the National Disability Authority, to identify the most appropriate form of support options to provide better outcomes for students with Special Educational Needs, having regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area.

In response to a progress report from the NCSE on the comprehensive review, I have requested the National Council for Special Education to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing an alternate and improved model for providing care

supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs.

This Working Group will commence its work upon its appointment and the work will run in tandem with the completion of the Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. It is intended that the reports of the Working group and of the Review will be completed early in 2018.

In addition, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Policy Advice on Educational Provision for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders was published in July 2016. The NCSE consulted widely with parents, professionals and other stakeholders and interested parties while also conducting research. The Policy advice is available on the NCSEs website www.ncse.ie.

My Department has convened an Implementation Group with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and external representatives to ensure that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered and that a timetable for implementation is prepared. The work of the Implementation Group is ongoing.

Schools Site Acquisitions

49. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made regarding securing a site for the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; when a site is expected to be purchased; the timeframe for works to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31565/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana is included on my Department's capital programme.

A preferred site option has been identified and officials from Donegal County Council, on behalf of my Department, have engaged in discussions with the landowner in question with a view to its acquisition, including on potential costs of acquisition. These discussions are progressing subject to clarification on some technical details which are currently under consideration.

Due to the commercial sensitivities attaching to site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to provide any further information at this time. I can assure the Deputy that all parties are working to progress this process to a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible.

Once the site acquisition is complete the project to deliver the schools will progress into architectural planning.

Higher Education Authority

50. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason board appointments are not being filled in the HEA; and his views on whether the organisation is adequately resourced to function. [31573/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The HEA Board currently comprises a Chairperson and 12 ordinary members. This includes two members who were reappointed to the Board recently.

The Minister is also inviting expressions of interest, through the Public Appointments Service, for a further two academic members. This application process is currently underway and the closing date for expressions of interest is 7 July.

Once these positions are filled, the Board of the HEA will comprise a Chair and 7 academic and 7 non-academic members. This satisfies the minimum number of Board members statutorily provided for under the HEA Act, 1971.

I am satisfied that the Board of the HEA is functioning effectively. However, in general, I am in favour of keeping state boards as small as possible and I will be looking to provide, through future legislation, for a reduced minimum size of the HEA Board.

In relation to resourcing of the organization more generally, my Department works closely with the HEA to ensure that its staffing requirements are met, within the provisions of the delegated sanction that has been agreed with the HEA and in the context of workforce planning requirements.

Primary Online Database

51. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of his Department's inspection and supervision of the primary online database system, its function in respect of assessing school needs, appropriate funding and allocations of the capitation grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31561/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of POD is to monitor the progress of children through the education system in order to ensure that every student can meet their educational potential, and to ensure that every child of compulsory school age is in receipt of an education. POD data will underpin the provision of education in primary schools, with grant payments and teacher allocations to schools based on the individually verified data.

The PPS number will be used as the unique pupil identifier on POD. This will allow for a child's educational history to be maintained accurately as they move school, as well as ensuring that there are no duplicate enrolments in the system. The PPS number will be obtained from the school and used to validate the identity of the pupil using the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform PPSN Checker service.

Each school can access only their own pupil's records on POD. Within the Department of Education, access to the individualised information recorded on POD is restricted to a small number of staff within the Statistics Section.

While the database is hosted by and data will be accessible to the Department of Education and Skills, the pupils' data is provided and kept up to date by the schools in which the pupils are enrolled.

This database contains the following individualised information on pupils in primary schools.

PPSN, Name, Address including Eircode, Birth Cert Name, Date of Birth, Gender, Mother's Birth Cert Name, Standard, Class, Nationality, Enrolment Date, Enrolment Source, Leaving Date, Leaving Destination, Integrated Indicator, Irish Exemption Indicator, Pupil Type, Special Class Type, Mother Tongue, Ethnic/Cultural Background, Religion

The system allows schools to make online returns to the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and provides the Department with the comprehensive and in-depth information needed to develop and evaluate educational policy.

What is it used for

- Completion of the National School Annual Census – As of September 2016 POD is the mechanism for schools to complete the Annual Census

- Teacher allocation and payment of capitation and other grants – Information submitted through the Annual Census forms the basis for teacher allocation, capitation and grant payments for each school

- Resource allocation and planning purposes

- Statistical Information- POD is the source of statistical information for the primary school sector

- Register of pupils – POD has removed the need for schools to maintain a hardcopy of their school's Clárleabhar, as all necessary information is recorded on the system

- Centralised updating of school information – POD provides a single point for schools to view and correct the details held by the Department.

Schools Building Projects Status

52. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will give urgent consideration to the ongoing requests of the board of management and parents' association to have a building project (details supplied) proceed to construction stage at an early date. [31732/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Stage 2(b) Detailed Design Report was recently submitted to my Department by the Board of Management and its Design Team. Following receipt of that submission, my Department authorised the Board of Management to instruct its Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process for the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered. This authorisation was granted by my Department in order to expedite the tender process for this project by running the pre-qualification in tandem with the finalisation of Stage 2(b). The Design Team has commenced this process and the closing date for the e-tenders advertisement was 19 June 2017. The Design Team has informed my Department that it expects to complete its assessment of the pre-qualification submissions in the coming weeks and will then submit its report on the shortlist of contractors to my Department.

Following examination of the Stage 2(b) Report, it became apparent that the submission was incomplete and some additional items which should have been included in the original submission, were requested by my Department. A revised submission has been received which is currently under review. Upon completion of the review of the revised 2(b) submission my Department will immediately revert to the school with a timeframe to proceed to tender and construction stage.

The Stage 2(b) submission is an extremely vital part in the design process and is the final check prior to the seeking of tenders for the construction of the school building.

School Accommodation Provision

53. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he has taken to alleviate the primary school accommodation crisis for parents living in west Swords in view of the over subscription for a school (details supplied) and the growing demographics that indicate the need for a significant expansion of primary school places for this area of Swords. [31726/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, there are 13 primary schools serving the Swords area. My Department has been in direct contact with a number of these schools in respect of their junior infant capacity. In that regard it is understood that two schools in the area have junior places available should parents wish to avail of them for September 2017.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is important that school size is monitored and that a balance is preserved among all schools in school planning areas to ensure that one school is not expanding at the expense of another school. While the situation may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice, the Deputy will appreciate that my Department's main responsibility is to ensure that the existing schools in the area can, between them, for this coming September cater for the demand for Junior Infant places.

My Department is also currently reviewing the demographic data for this area with regard to future needs. This review takes account of updated data from CSO, enrolment and child benefit data. This review is currently ongoing as part of the overall demographic analyses of all school planning areas nationwide at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. This process is detailed and rigorous and will take some time to complete. It is anticipated that decisions based on the review will be announced later in 2017.

Capitation Grants

54. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of his Department's work in seeking to increase the capitation grant per pupil in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31562/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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. Budget 2018 will be the next opportunity to build on the progress made in 2017.

The process is under way for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. 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.

In relation to capitation funding this commitment remains a priority for me to address during the lifetime of the Action Plan. Work is underway in relation to the annual budgetary pro-

cess; the outcome of this process is announced on Budget day.

Special Educational Needs Staff

55. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to bring forward the date of allocating SNA resources to schools to March-April as recommended by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31700/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that this week, I announced that 975 additional SNAs will be available for allocation to schools from September 2017 which is a 7.5% increase to meet the demands for the new school year.

A total of 13,990 SNA posts will now be available at a gross annual cost of €458 million. This is more SNAs than we have ever had previously and will ensure that all children who qualify for SNA support can continue to receive access to such support. In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by over 32% since 2011, when 10,575 posts were available.

The NCSE has advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2017/18 school year. Details of the allocations which have been made to schools have now been published on www.ncse.ie.

Where a school wishes to make an application for SNA support in respect of a child who was not considered as part of this allocation process they may continue to make such applications to the NCSE.

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

The method of provision for the additional posts this year has been similar to that for the past six years when decisions were made in late June or early July. This is not a satisfactory approach and we intend that in this year's estimates, provision will be made for the anticipated extra need in the same way as for other elements of the education system.

In response to a progress report from the NCSE on the comprehensive review it is undertaking of the SNA Scheme, I have requested the National Council for Special Education to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing an alternate and improved model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs.

The Working Group will commence its work upon its appointment and the work will run in tandem with the completion of the Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. It is intended that the reports of the Working group and of the Review will be completed early in 2018.

In 2017 my Department will invest €1.68 billion in special education, almost one fifth of the entire education budget. This is a 32% increase since 2011.

- The number of Special Classes has increased by 120% with over 600 new special classes opened since 2011. Approximately 1,150 special classes are now in place with 164 new Special Classes to be opened for the coming 2017/18 school year.

- The new model for allocating Resource Teachers to schools has been successfully introduced, with 900 additional teacher allocated from September 2017, bringing the number of Special Education Teaching posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools to over 13,400 for the 2017/2018 school year, to support the model and to ensure that children with

special needs can access additional teaching supports.

- over 1,400 teachers in 125 special schools
- Assistive technology/specialised equipment.
- Special school transport arrangements.
- Enhanced capitation grants for special schools and special classes attached to mainstream primary and post primary schools.
- Modification of school buildings.
- Special Arrangements for State Examinations.

ESF Aided Fund for Students with Disabilities at third level.

- Vocational Training for people with disabilities.
- Adult Education – once off projects for disability in education.

The aim of this Government is to continue to use our economic success to ensure that children with special educational needs can be supported to fully participate in schools and fulfil their potential.

Copyright Infringement

56. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding fees to an organisation for each night of live music; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31904/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In general, playing music in public places is an act that is governed by copyright law. The relevant legislation is the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 (the CRRA). This legislation gives the owners of copyright works, which includes musical works, certain rights over the use of their works. If covered by copyright, the act of making the musical work available in public is a restricted act. In the context of music, this applies on two levels: making available in public recorded music that is owned by record companies, including also the performers involved in the recording; separately, songwriters, composers and music publishers are entitled to copyright protection where their works are made available in public. It is for this reason that premises such as those referred to by the Deputy need to be licensed for the use of musical recordings that are broadcast via radio, tv etc. and, separately for the public performance of live acts or recorded music on the premises.

The CRRA provides the means for copyright holders to engage with Collective Management Organisations to represent their rights in relation to the public use of their copyright protected works. These organisations are responsible for the collection and distribution of royalties to their members and operate under licence obtained from the Controller of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks, which licence is renewable annually.

The Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO) is a collecting organisation that operates as a licensed body under the CRRA and it represents the rights of its members i.e. songwriters, composers and music publishers in Ireland. Music users such as broadcasters, licensed premises where music is played etc. are required by law to pay for the use of copyright music. Phono-

graphic Performance Ireland (PPI) is also a licensed body under the CRRA that represents the rights of record companies and performers.

IMRO, through an agency arrangement with PPI, introduced a new system of music licensing for business. This new system of 'dual licensing' came into effect on 1 January 2016 with the intention of simplifying the licensing process for music users. Under this new arrangement IMRO administers the granting of copyright music licences, collection of royalties, and related activities on behalf of both organisations. The new arrangement enables business to obtain the appropriate copyright music licences by making a single payment.

As Minister, I do not have any function in the setting of tariffs charged by organisations representing the rights of copyright holders. However, it is open to a person affected by such charges to refer a dispute in relation to a licensing scheme to the Controller of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, who has certain statutory functions in this area under the CRRA.

Section 152 of the CRRA provides that where a dispute arises between the operator of a licensing scheme concerned with copyright works and a person claiming that he or she requires a licence under the scheme, that person or operator may refer the scheme to the Controller for determination.

The legislation provides the Controller with two options for dealing with the referral. The Controller can consider the matter referred and make an order, confirming or varying the scheme. Alternatively, the Controller may refer the matter to an arbitrator for consideration. The procedures to be followed and fees payable in relation to references to the Controller are set out in the Copyright and Related Rights (Proceedings before the Controller) Rules 2009 (S.I. No. 20 of 2009).

Both the CRRA and the Copyright and Related Rights (Proceedings before the Controller) Rules 2009 (S.I. No. 20 of 2009) are available on my Department's website at <https://www.djei.ie/en/What-We-Do/Innovation-Research-Development/Intellectual-Property/Legislation/> or by clicking here: IP Legislation page.

Employment Rights

57. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will commission an investigation into work conditions in the film industry and the possible misuse of the trainee system to ensure that there are no breaches of employment laws including the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Working) Act 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31846/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I understand that the Deputy raised the matter of the possible misuse of the trainee system in the film industry in the context of the film tax relief scheme in a recent Dail Question to the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, who has responsibility in this area. I understand further that the Minister asked the Deputy to provide details of the possible misuse and undertook to have the matter examined by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

From an employment rights point of view, Ireland has a comprehensive body of employment protection legislation designed to protect employees engaged under different types of employment arrangements.

The Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003 provides that fixed-term em-

ployees may not be treated less favourably than comparable permanent employees, unless the employer can objectively justify the different treatment. Less favourable treatment of a worker may be objectively justified if it is for the purpose of achieving a legitimate objective of the employer and such treatment is appropriate and necessary for that purpose. However, any justification offered cannot be connected with the fact that the employee is on a fixed-term contract.

The 2003 Act also establishes a framework to prevent abuses arising from the use of successive fixed-term employment contracts. The Act provides that where an employee has been on two or more continuous fixed-term contracts, the total duration of those contracts may not exceed four years. After this, if the employer wishes to renew the employee's contract, it is deemed to be a contract of indefinite duration unless there are objective grounds justifying the renewal of the contract for a fixed term only.

The Unfair Dismissal Act 1977 as amended contains a provision aimed at ensuring that successive temporary contracts are not used in order to avoid that legislation. It provides that where a fixed-term or specified-purpose contract expires and the individual is re-employed within 3 months, the individual is deemed to have continuous service for the purposes of that Act.

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

Employment Rights

58. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on whether the refusal of 40 security companies to pay the recent increase set by the ERO for the security industry undermines such orders; the steps she will take to ensure workers receive this increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31847/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Deputy as previously advised, 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.

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

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

Employment Regulation Order (Security Industry Joint Labour Committee) 2017 (SI No.

231 of 2017) came into effect from 1 June last and revokes the 2015 Order.

A similar number of inspections will be carried out in the sector this year under the new order as were previously carried out under the 2015 Order.

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

The Workplace Relations Commission has been advised that there is evidence to suggest that a number of security companies have indicated their intention not to implement the provisions of the Employment Regulation Order (Security Industry Joint Labour Committee) 2017 though it is not aware of the identities of the companies concerned. I would ask you Deputy to pass on any information you have to the Workplace Relations Commission about alleged non-compliance with the Order.

The Private Security Authority (PSA) is the statutory body with responsibility for licensing and regulating the private security industry in Ireland. The PSA is an independent body under the aegis of the Department of Justice and Equality and my Department is represented on its Board.

It has, in accordance with the Private Security Services Acts 2004 and 2011, a statutory mandate which includes:

Granting and renewing licences.

Issuing identity cards to licensees.

Suspending and revoking licences.

Establishing and maintaining a register of licensees.

Specifying standards to be observed in the provision of security services.

Specifying qualifications or requirements for the granting of licences.

It sets down the requirements which contractors are expected to meet and maintain in order to comply with the licensing regulations of the Authority. One such requirement is compliance with relevant legislation. The Employment Regulation Order that's in place for the sector falls into this category.

Employers that do not comply therefore with the terms of the Employment Regulation Order risk having their licenses suspended or revoked. If this were to happen then the employer concerned would no longer be able to legally operate in the Security Sector.

IDA Site Visits

59. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA client visits to each county in 2017, by month, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31962/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): IDA Ireland maintains statistics of site visits by potential investors on a quarterly basis only. In the first quarter of 2017, there were 173 site visits, up from 136 for the same period in

2016. It is expected that data on site visits for quarter two 2017 will be available at the end of this month.

The table sets out, on a county-by-county basis, the number of IDA Ireland-sponsored site visits for quarter one 2017. Earlier this week I attended the launch of IDA's 2017 half-year results where the IDA reaffirmed its target of increasing investment in each region of Ireland by 30%-40% by 2019. In 2016, almost two thirds of new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland-supported companies, and over half of those created by IDA-supported companies, were outside Dublin. Based on current data all regions are on target to meet or exceed the job targets set down to be delivered by 2020 in each regional action plan for jobs

Site Visits by County for Quarter 1 2017

County	Q1 2017
Carlow	3
Cavan	0
Clare	10
Cork	9
Donegal	1
Dublin	82
Galway	23
Kerry	1
Kildare	2
Kilkenny	2
Laois	0
Leitrim	1
Limerick	10
Longford	0
Louth	5
Mayo	0
Meath	0
Monaghan	1
Offaly	1
Roscommon	1
Sligo	2
Tipperary	5
Waterford	3
Westmeath	9
Wexford	1
Wicklow	1
Total	173

Action Plan for Jobs

60. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the regional job targets and unemployment rate projections under the programme for Government for 2020 and enterprise 2025, by year and by region, in tabular form; the latest figures at hand for these targets; the monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place; her job targets up

to 2020 by region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31965/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Programme for Partnership Government commitment is to support the creation of 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 jobs outside of Dublin.

Regional job creation targets have been set through the Regional Action Plan for Jobs, the primary objective of which is to have a further 10 to 15 per cent at work in each region by 2020, with the aim, as set out in Enterprise 2025, of having the unemployment rate of each region within one per cent of the national average.

In keeping with the medium to longer term ambition of the Regional Plans, these targets are not broken down on a yearly basis.

The published targets for jobs to be created, in addition to the latest employment data from the CSO showing job creation and current unemployment rates, for each of the 8 NUTS III regions, is laid out in the following table:

Region	Published Regional APJ targets by 2020	Net new jobs created Q1 2015 –Q1 2017	Unemployment Rate at Q1 2017
North East/North West	28,000	4,700	7.5%
Midland	14,000	7,300	7.8%
West	25,000	17,900	6.9%
Dublin	66,000	42,300	6.3%
Mid-East	25,000	9,000	5.0%
Mid-West	23,000	9,300	6.8%
South-East	25,000	12,400	9.3%
South-West	40,000	12,700	5.9%
State Total	246,000	115,600	6.7%

The unemployment rate has fallen in all regions in the past year while, during the same period, more than three out of every four new jobs created were outside Dublin. In 2016, almost two thirds of new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland-supported companies, and over half of those created by IDA-supported companies, were outside Dublin. Based on current data all regions are on target to meet or exceed the job targets set down in 2015 for each region to be delivered by 2020.

Each Regional Action Plan is being monitored and driven by a local Implementation Committee, comprising representatives from the Enterprise Sector, as well as the Local Authorities, Enterprise Agencies, and other public bodies in the region. Collaboration between the private and the public sector has been a core element in each plan's development, and is central to each plan's delivery.

Progress Reports are being published twice yearly. First Progress Reports for all plans were published in December 2016. Second progress reports from 5 of the 8 regions were published on 26 June 2017, with the remaining 3 currently being finalised.

Action Plan for Jobs

61. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of members of each regional action plan implementation committee, by region,

in tabular form; the gender breakdown; when each committee was first established; and the number of meetings held to date in 2017 and projected for the year. [31966/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Implementation Committee	Mid-East	Midlands	Mid-West	North East	North West	West	South West	South East	Dublin
Total number of members	32	36	35	35	38	40	39	56	35
Female members	14	11	15	8	7	11	18	16	10
Male members	18	25	20	27	31	29	21	40	25
Established (date of first meeting)	15 July 2016	2 March 2016	9 March 2016	25 April 2016	25 April 2016	18 April 2016	15 December 2015	26 November 2015	19 September 2016
Meetings held in 2017	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2
Meetings projected until end 2017	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Delivery of each Regional Action Plan is being overseen by an Implementation Committee, with membership drawn from industry, local authorities, Enterprise Agencies, education sector and other key stakeholders and agencies. Regional Implementation Committees meet approximately every six months to review and report on progress on the delivery of the actions in the Action Plan for Jobs for their respective region. Some of the Regional Committees have established smaller Sectoral Working Groups tasked with identifying and developing new actions to be added to the Action Plan as they emerge over the lifetime of the Plan.

Note:

At its meeting in September, 2016, the North East/North West Implementation Committee

decided for practical reasons to divide the region into two formations— North East and North West – each with its own committee driving the actions. The North East and North West Committees held their first meeting under the new formations in January and February, 2017 respectively.

Trade Agreements

62. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the European Union free trade agreements entered into since 2000 that have included dispute settlement mechanism based on the WTO dispute settlement mechanism in tabular form. [31967/17]

63. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the European Union free trade agreements entered into since 2009 which include investor to state dispute settlement mechanisms in trade and investment agreements in tabular form. [31968/17]

64. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of bilateral trade agreements entered into by EU member states since the late 1960s which contain provisions to protect investments and investor to state dispute settlement. [31969/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 to 64, inclusive, together.

A key feature of regional trade agreements, which comprise of customs unions, free trade agreements (“FTAs”), economic partnership agreements (“EPAs”), and bilateral investment treaties (“BITs”) is the provision for the settlement of disputes between the state parties concerning the interpretation and application of the agreements’ provisions.

Since the late 1960s, over 1400 bilateral investment agreements, or BITs, have been entered into by EU Member States which have contained provisions to protect investments.

The European Union has included dispute settlement mechanisms based on the WTO dispute settlement mechanism in all of its Trade Agreements since 2000. The Free Trade Agreements which have concluded with the provisions are as follows:

Free Trade Agreement	Conclusion of Negotiations	Signed	Date of Provisional Application/Date in force
South Korea	2009	2010	2011/2015
Columbia Peru	2010	2012	2013
Ecuador*	2014	2016	2017
Canada	2014	2016	Pending
Singapore	2014	Pending	Pending
Vietnam	2016	Pending	Pending
Japan	Pending	Pending	Pending

*Ecuador joined the EU-Columbia/Peru Free Trade Agreement on 11 November 2016. The talks for a Trade Agreement were launched in January 2009 between the EU and Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. In July 2009, Ecuador suspended its participation in the talks. Negotiations for an EU-Colombia/Peru Free Trade Agreement were concluded in March 2010, with the Agreement being provisionally applied as of March 2013 with Peru and August 2013 with

Colombia. In January 2014 Ecuador formally resumed negotiations, and these concluded in July 2014.

Since 2009 the European Union has also included dispute settlement mechanisms for investment disputes in free trade agreements. These agreements are as follows;

Free Trade Agreement	Conclusion of Negotiations	Signed	Date of Provisional Application/Date in force
Canada	2014	2016	Pending
Singapore	2014	Pending	Pending
Vietnam	2016	Pending	Pending
Japan	Pending	Pending	Pending

In late 2015, the Commission proposed a new approach to investment protection based on an international Investment Court System (ICS), to replace the historic Investor State Dispute Settlement system. The new system is an independent investment court system, consisting of a permanent tribunal and an appeal tribunal competent to review decisions of the tribunal. Dispute settlement proceedings will be conducted in a transparent and impartial manner. Provisions for the application of such a system have been included in more recent FTAs.

The ultimate aim of the European Commission is to establish a multilateral court, modelled on arbitrator panels currently operating under the WTO, and other Investment Tribunals. It will build on the EU's approach on its bilateral FTAs and be a major departure from the system of investor-to-State dispute settlement (ISDS) based on ad hoc commercial arbitration. The recently concluded EU-Canada trade agreement (CETA) and the EU-Vietnam trade agreement both contain a reference to the establishment of a permanent multilateral investment court. Work continues at EU level on this matter.

Waste Management

65. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she has satisfied herself that there is diversity and competition within the waste collection market; the examination which the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has carried out in respect of waste companies; the basis on which it can be established that there are no restrictive practices in operation in view of the fact that all companies operating in the market are registered off shore for tax purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32018/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory independent body responsible for the enforcement of domestic and EU competition law in the State. Section 9 (5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the CCPC is independent in the performance of its functions. I, as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in such matters.

I am informed that the CCPC has engaged extensively both with the sector and with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment on its concerns regarding compliance with both competition and consumer protection legislation. I understand that the CCPC has formed these concerns based on a significant amount of contacts from consumers and anecdotal evidence. In particular, the CCPC has concerns about the extent of competition in some areas, where consumers have little, if any, choice of waste collector. Specifically with

regard to anti-competitive behaviour, a number of allegations have been received but with insufficient evidence to merit the CCPC opening formal investigations.

The CCPC is being asked to report on the operation of the household waste collection market in order to inform the future development of national waste management policy before the end of 2017, which will provide an evidence base to establish a regulator to prevent price gouging.

Issues relating to the tax status of waste collection companies do not come within the statutory remit of the CCPC.

Unfair Dismissals

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the most appropriate action available to a person (details supplied) that is of the view that they were unfairly dismissed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32031/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): With effect from 1 October 2015, the activities of the Labour Relations Commission, the National Employment Rights Authority, the Equality Tribunal and the first instance functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal and the Labour Court were merged into a new Body of First Instance, known as the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). From 1 October 2015, all complaints fall to be referred to the Workplace Relations Commission in the first instance, and, on appeal, to the Labour Court.

The WRC's core services include the provision of early resolution, mediation, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services, adjudication on employment and equality complaints, the monitoring of employment conditions to ensure the compliance and enforcement of employment rights legislation, the provision of information, and the processing of employment agency and protection of young persons (employment) licences.

Complaints under the Unfair Dismissals Acts may be referred within six months of the dismissal, or if the Adjudicator is satisfied that there were exceptional circumstances, within twelve months of the dismissal. The relevant on-line complaint form is available from the WRC's website at www.workplacelrelations.ie. A decision of an Adjudicator may be appealed by either party to the Labour Court within six weeks of the decision.

The WRC provides an information service providing information regarding employment rights obligations for employers and employment rights entitlements for employees. An information booklet on the Unfair Dismissals Acts is available on request from the WRC or can be downloaded from the website. The WRC can be contacted at lo-call 1890 80 80 90 or 059 917 8990. The phone service opening hours are 9:30am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

Financial Services Regulation

67. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding regulated entities sending unsolicited messages to firms and persons here and abroad regarding loan products they have; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31862/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank that regulated entities providing financial services in Ireland are required to comply with the Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code).

The Code applies to financial services providers authorised, registered or licensed by the Central Bank; and financial services providers authorised, registered or licensed in another EU or EEA Member State when providing services in this State on a branch or cross-border basis.

Provisions 3.37 – 3.45 in Chapter 3 of the Code relate to personal visits and telephone contact with consumers.

In relation to telephone contact, there are prescribed circumstances where telephone contact can be made and the Code distinguishes between existing customers of the firm and other consumers, including that the consumer has given their consent to being contacted in this way. Telephone contact can only be made between 9am and 9pm Monday to Saturday, unless otherwise agreed with the consumer. The definition of “consumer” includes SME’s with a turnover of less than €3 million or less. I understand that the Central Bank would not consider that a firm which sends a text message to a consumer outside of these hours would be in violation of this provision.

It should be noted that the obligation on a regulated entity to meet the requirements set out in Provisions 3.40 to 3.45 is without prejudice to any other obligations a regulated entity is subject to, including without limitation, under the Data Protection legislation and as stipulated in the European Communities (Electronic Communications Network and Services) (Privacy and Electronic Communication) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 336 of 2011). Regulation 13 of S.I. 336 of 2011 deals with unsolicited communications. Policy responsibility for this area lies with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Tax Compliance

68. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of allowing the use of section 110 tax status by those involved in the business of loan origination (details supplied); and his plans with regard to stopping these businesses operating in a tax neutral manner. [31930/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 sets out the Irish regime for the taxation of special purpose companies set up to securitise assets. The tax provisions are intended to create a tax neutral regime for securitisation and structured finance purposes.

If the loan origination company is a qualifying company (within the meaning of section 110 TCA 1997) then it would be able to operate in a direct tax neutral manner in Ireland. There are a number of non-bank lenders currently active in the Irish market. These lenders are seen as an important alternative source of credit to Irish businesses which is why it was provided that they would not be impacted by the introduction of the new subsection (5A) to section 110 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, as passed in the 2016 Finance Act.

It should be noted that it is also possible for an Irish resident company carrying on a loan origination business to achieve near tax neutrality under the normal corporation tax rules. Equally, if the investment bank that was based in a country with which we have a double tax agreement (and which taxes interest received from non-residents), lent directly to its Irish customers, then no Irish tax would arise on those profits. For a non-resident lender to achieve Irish tax neutrality there is an administration burden placed on the Irish borrowers.

The main benefits of using a section 110 company are therefore the certainty which the lenders have in relation to the tax treatment available; in addition Irish borrowers would experience an increased administrative burden if a non-resident lender is used rather than a section 110

company.

I am advised by Revenue that there is no loss to the Exchequer from allowing section 110 companies carry out loan originations in a tax neutral manner.

Sale of State Assets

69. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the sale of a bank's (details supplied) shares could be used for anything other than the reduction of debt such as an instalment in the rainy day fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31956/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Any proceeds from a sale of shares held in a bank by the State would not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance (GGB) under the European System of Accounts 2010 (ESA 2010) framework. This is due to the fact that such transactions are classified as a 'financial transaction' whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash). Consequently, any such sale would not count as general government revenue. Accordingly, if any such proceeds are used for general government expenditure at any time, the general government balance will worsen.

In the first instance, the proceeds would go to the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). Such proceeds can then be transferred on to the Exchequer if the Minister for Finance so directs. If the money were to remain with the ISIF then it could be used as part of the ISIF's investment portfolio and must adhere to the ISIF's double bottom line mandate of a commercial return and economic impact. The requirement to achieve a commercial return ensure that the investment does not impact the general government balance.

If the proceeds are lodged to the Exchequer, then the NTMA will, in the normal course of events, take them into account in their funding plans and, all things being equal, it would result in Ireland's Exchequer borrowing requirement reducing and, consequently, Ireland's gross debt and debt to GDP ratio being reduced.

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

The rainy day fund is currently under review and further information will be provided in the Summer Economic Statement (SES) to be published shortly. The possibility of lodging the proceeds of a sale to a rainy day fund, as suggested by the Deputy, would depend on the legislation establishing the fund.

Irish Strategic Investment Fund

70. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of investments that the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund is party to that uses the section 110 tax structure; his plans to review such investments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31971/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTMA has advised me that a

fundamental aspect of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund's (the "Fund") mandate is, as a commercial investor on behalf of the State, to act as a catalyst for co-investment in the Irish economy from private sector capital. Accordingly the Fund structures its investments in a commercial manner and it is essential that it do so if it is to be successful in attracting investment into Ireland.

In that context the Fund is party to six investments which involve Section 110 tax structures. These are fully consistent with the purpose of the Fund and support a range of investments, principally in housing and also in the SME, Agri and Real Estate sectors. The investments were made in the period since 2013 and are active in the market place.

These investments are also consistent with the original purposes of the Section 110 securitisation regime which was introduced to encourage securitisation and other forms of financial activity in Ireland and has helped job creation and investment in the Irish financial services sector for many years.

The changes made to Section 110 in the Finance Act 2016 relate to specific uses of the Section which are not a feature of or relevant to the Fund's investments. The independent managers of these investments have confirmed that there is no additional tax liability arising from the legislative changes to Section 110 in the Finance Act 2016 for any of the investors in these investments.

Universal Social Charge Yield

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department and the Revenue Commissioners have reached conclusions as to whether the cost of the USC reductions in budget 2017 were underestimated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31972/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The position is that officials from my Department and the Revenue Commissioners have been reviewing the USC performance. As part of the review, my Department and Revenue have re-examined the Budget 2017 USC costings, and are satisfied that the costings are as accurate as possible given the complexities involved in forecasting.

Furthermore, as part of the continuous efforts to improve the Department's tax forecasting performance, the ESRI and my Department jointly examined the sensitivity of income tax and USC revenues to changes in income. As a result of this work, which was published in March 2017, the Department has revised the income tax and USC revenue elasticities used in the forecasting process. These new elasticities were used in the forecasts for 2018 and subsequent years in the 2017 Stability Programme Update published in April. However, it should be noted that a "back-casting" using the revised elasticities would imply a lower USC forecast for this year.

Tracker Mortgages Examination Data

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the tax relief at source deducted from the interest refunds banks are making to certain customers as a result of the Central Bank tracker mortgage examination by bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31974/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue administers mortgage interest

relief in accordance with Section 244 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The level of relief applied by lenders to each case is based on the applicable ceiling, the rate of relief allowable and the percentage of the loan that qualifies for the relief. The information required by the lenders to ensure that the correct level of relief is applied is provided by Revenue through an electronic file transfer system that operates on a monthly basis.

Revenue is currently in discussions with the lenders to quantify the full amount of excess mortgage interest relief to be repaid on foot of the tracker mortgage redress examination. The process requires the lenders to deal directly with Revenue in regard to the findings and refund any excess amounts that were paid to borrowers.

While the exact amount is not yet fully quantified, €2.8m has already been repaid to Revenue by the lenders and it is expected that the remaining amounts will be recovered. Revenue is constrained from providing breakdowns in respect of the individual lenders by Section 851A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

Financial Services Sector

73. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of each investment that has been announced for Ireland in the financial services area since the Brexit vote in June 2016 involving the transfer of operations from the City of London; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31975/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Contingency planning for Brexit has been ongoing at all levels of Government well in advance of the UK EU referendum in June 2016. Ireland has a successful track record of competing for, and winning, global foreign direct investment. One of the key pillars of that success is the growth of the International Financial Services (IFS) sector, in particular over the past 30 years. Ireland is now recognised internationally as a leading global centre for internationally traded financial services.

In March 2015, the Government launched the IFS2020 Strategy, a whole-of-government approach to further driving the growth and development of the IFS sector in Ireland. Implementation of the IFS2020 Strategy and the annual Action Plans is driven by a public sector High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC). The Minister of State for Financial Services chairs quarterly meetings of the IFS2020 Joint Committee, comprising of members of the public sector HLIC and senior IFS industry representatives. Brexit is a standing agenda item at these quarterly meetings.

The Government is keen to maximise on opportunities that arise from Brexit where possible. The IFS2020 Strategy, the long-term vision for international financial services, was developed and put in place long before the UK decision to leave the EU. However, it provides a clear framework to maximise any opportunities that might arise from that decision particularly through the annual Action Plans. The annual Action Plans enable a tailored response to deal with these challenges and opportunities as they arise. The IFS2020 Strategy combines long-term strategic thinking with the flexible tools to react to any domestic and international developments occurring over the period.

In January the IFS2020 Action Plan for 2017 was launched, the Action Plan has two sections, the first is a contextual piece in respect of Brexit, and the second section outlines the 40 specific measures to be actioned under the plan and the lead government departments, agencies or industry bodies who lead on each measure.

Also in January, the second annual European Financial Forum was held in Dublin Castle.

The forum, which was hosted by the then Minister of State Eoghan Murphy TD is designed to showcase Ireland's financial services offering to an international audience and highlight the Government's commitment to the development of international financial services in Ireland.

The former Minister of State for Financial Services has undertaken a significant number of overseas visits to promote Ireland as a destination for financial services investment and launch the IFS Ireland banner brand.

The IFS2020 strategy is on track to meet and possibly exceed its job target of 10,000 by 2020. The first 2 years of the governments IFS 2020 strategy has seen consecutive years of net job gains consisting of approximately 2,500 net job gains in 2015 and 2,000 in 2016.

While some companies have chosen their preferred post Brexit location many others have yet to make a final decision on their post Brexit strategy and associated location choice. It is anticipated that many of these companies, particularly the large more complex entities requiring extended regulatory lead times will make their decision in the coming weeks and months.

It is difficult to specify the potential outcome of these companies' deliberations as all are closely monitoring the ongoing UK-EU Brexit discussions and with view to assessing the impact on their respective operations in the UK and across the EU.

Various state actors including IDA Ireland, the Department of Finance and the Central Bank of Ireland as a regulator are involved in detailed discussions with numerous companies positioning Ireland as their preferred Brexit location

Over a dozen firms have indicated that Ireland is their preferred choice for their post Brexit operations. In respect of relocations not every firm will want to make the relocation decision public for commercial and other reasons. The State continues to engage with a substantial number of other firms who have yet to make their final decision.

We have a very strong offering and we've done extensive work to promote that offering. We are aware that not every decision will go our way. There will be an ebb and flow to this, and the flow to Ireland will be strong from decisions that have already been made in our favour. Despite the many advantages that Ireland can offer firms moving operations from the UK to Ireland because of Brexit other factors could also determine their final relocation choices.

VAT Yield

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of introducing a zero rate of VAT for the construction of new residential homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31976/17]

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of introducing a 9% rate of VAT for the construction of new residential homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31977/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 75 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to EU VAT law, with which Irish VAT law must comply. Under the EU VAT Directive 2006/112/EC it is not possible to introduce a zero rate of VAT on any good or service that had not already applied at the zero rate of VAT on and from 1 January 1991. As the services of

construction of residential property was not zero-rated for VAT purposes in Ireland on and from that date, the zero rate cannot now be applied the service.

With regard to the application of the 9% VAT rate, it is tentatively estimated that introducing a 9% VAT rate specific to residential construction could cost in the region of €240m. This is based on an extrapolation from a number of data sources, including residential completions, residential construction projects under current development and the average selling price of new residential homes.

Corporation Tax Regime

76. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the independent assessment on corporation tax to be completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31979/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In September last year, the Government decided to arrange for a review of Ireland's corporation tax code by an independent expert, Mr Seamus Coffey. The decision was taken with a view to ensuring that Ireland's corporation tax code meets the new international tax standards while remaining competitive in a growing economy.

On 30 June 2017, Mr Coffey submitted a 'Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code,' which I am now considering carefully before deciding on the appropriate next steps.

Motor Insurance Costs

77. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update for quarter 2 of the insurance working group's action plan on the rising cost of motor insurance; the quarter two actions that have yet to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31980/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is a commitment within the *Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance* that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations and the first such update was published in early May. That update provides details on how the implementation of the recommendations is progressing, with a particular focus on the ten action points which were due for completion during the first quarter.

My Department will publish the second quarterly update shortly. As with the first quarterly update, this will again show the progress to date on the overall implementation of the recommendations, but this time with a particular focus on the 17 action points which were due for completion during the second quarter of 2017.

My officials are currently in the process of collating all of the relevant updates from the individual relevant Government Departments and Agencies in order to compile the full quarterly report and, therefore, I am not in a position at this stage to provide the Deputy with the information he has sought in respect of Q2 actions which have yet to be completed. It should be noted that the number of actions scheduled for completion in Q2 is higher than that due in any other quarter while, in addition, substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of a number of the other 44 actions, including all eight which are classified as "ongoing" in the Action Plan.

Tax Strategy Group

78. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the Tax Strategy Group will publish its papers on different tax headings here; the different areas of tax to be covered in the papers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31981/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Preparatory work in relation to the Tax Strategy Group for 2017 is close to completion. A number of topics have been advanced and the agenda will be finalised shortly. It is envisaged however, that the following Papers will be included: Income Tax and USC, General Excises, PRSI, Social Protection Package, Capital Taxes/Exit Tax/DIRT, Corporation Tax, VAT and Climate and Environmental Taxes. Other topics for discussion / review may be included also.

It is my intention that, as last year, publication of the Papers on my Department's website will take place shortly after the meeting and I would expect this to happen before the end of July.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

79. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the tax ready reckoner to be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31982/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that a Ready Reckoner is currently published on the Revenue website (<http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>). This Ready Reckoner is prepared on a post-Budget 2017 basis. I am informed that Revenue expect to publish a pre-Budget 2018 basis Ready Reckoner later in July, which would be around a month earlier than in 2016.

Summer Economic Statement

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to publish the Summer Economic Statement 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31988/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Summer Economic Statement (SES) is a key element of the reformed budgetary process which complements the Stability Programme Update. While the macroeconomic outlook will be as set out in the Stability Programme Update, the SES will provide an updated assessment of the fiscal space available for 2018. It will also outline the key elements of the Government's economic strategy.

The SES is expected to be published in mid-July.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he plans to make a decision on the future of the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31989/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, during the Committee Stage debate on Finance Bill 2016, my predecessor agreed to commission an

independent impact assessment on the effects of the Help to Buy incentive for completion prior to Budget 2018. Following a competitive tender process, Indecon Economic Consultants were appointed in April to undertake this assessment.

This purpose of the project, in general, is to assess whether the policy objectives on the supply of new homes are being met, what impact (if any) the scheme is having on new and second-hand house prices, and what impact the scheme is having on the residential property market generally.

Any moves to amend or suspend the incentive prior to the completion of this report, which is scheduled for the end of August, would effectively pre-judge the outcome of the analysis. Once received from Indecon, the contents and findings of the report will be considered and I will decide on any appropriate action(s) to take in relation to its findings, in the context of my deliberations as part of the annual budgetary process.

Finally, I would like to reassure members of the public who may be in the process of applying for the Help to Buy incentive, or those who currently have applications pending, that speculation concerning its abolition will not impact negatively on their applications. I would propose to signal well in advance, any proposed changes to the incentive following my consideration of the Indecon report.

Insurance Industry Regulation

82. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the problem of fraudulent car insurance brokers; the steps he is taking to address this issue; the regime in place for establishing the bona fides of brokers; the penalties attached to fraudulent trading; and his views on the adequacy of the current regime. [32015/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the issue raised by the Deputy. I note that An Garda Síochána this week advised the public on how to avoid such fraudulent insurance brokers, discouraging motorists, for example, from buying insurance policies from unusual sources such as social networks, or in bars or restaurants or public places.

A valid certificate of motor insurance can be obtained either directly from an Insurance Undertaking or an Insurance Intermediary, otherwise known as a Broker. The Central Bank of Ireland encourage anyone intending to engage with an Insurance Intermediary, to check its online register to ensure that the firm is authorised to provide the service offered. If a firm is not registered to provide that service, individuals should avoid using it. The registers can be checked at <http://registers.centralbank.ie/>.

Some Insurance Intermediaries may be registered in other EEA Member States, and thus are permitted to provide services to customers in Ireland. If in doubt, consumers should contact the Central Bank on 01 224 4000 to confirm if such firms are permitted to operate in Ireland.

Whenever the Central Bank becomes aware of unauthorised firms in operation, it issues a public warning notice and refers the firm to the Gardaí. To date, approximately 294 unauthorised firms have been the subject of Central Bank warning notices.

It is a criminal offence for an unauthorised firm/person to provide financial services in Ireland that would require an authorisation under the relevant legislation which the Central Bank is the responsible body for enforcing.

In that respect, I am satisfied that the Central Bank has the necessary powers in order for it

to carry out its functions.

Property Tax Collection

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent of outstanding property tax due on the home of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32040/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the outstanding Local Property Tax (LPT) liabilities in respect of the property in question have been paid in recent days.

The payments covered the tax element only and did not include interest liabilities that accrued at 4% per annum on foot of LPT deferrals for the years 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Revenue has confirmed that it will make direct contact with the liable person in the coming days in regard to the outstanding interest liabilities with a view to concluding matters.

Tax Compliance

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if a solution might be found to facilitate the needs of the Revenue Commissioners and taxpayer in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32049/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Revenue's primary goal is to ensure that all taxpayers and businesses meet their tax obligations in a timely fashion. Any delay in the collection of tax revenue impacts on the level and timeliness of the financial resources available to the Exchequer and adds to Government borrowing and public debt interest. Accordingly, Revenue has a strong focus on making sure that everyone complies with their responsibilities to file and pay the right amount of tax on time.

The person in question has a poor tax compliance record and has only recently filed her Income Tax returns for the previous five years, which has allowed Revenue to quantify the full extent of her outstanding liabilities.

Revenue has confirmed that it is willing to agree a mutually acceptable phased payment arrangement with the person in respect of the outstanding amounts. Any such arrangement will be dependent on commitments in regard to the timely payment of current taxes and will also include statutory interest on which Revenue has no discretion. Revenue will make direct contact with the person in the coming days to discuss the issue.

Public Procurement Contracts

85. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a new standard approach to awarding government contracts for taxi services is being considered; if so, the changes proposed; if a new tender will include criteria for a minimum number of accessible taxis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31970/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) established a framework contract for the provision of taxi

services in the Greater Dublin Area in April 2015. This contract is renewable annually up to a maximum duration of four years. While the OGP established this framework contract, the OGP is not the Contracting Authority on any other taxi contracts.

Prior to establishing this framework contract the OGP engaged in a market consultation process to assist in identifying market capabilities for the provision of taxi services. The market operates on the basis of loose arrangements between Dispatch Operators and individual vehicle owners. In response to this engagement, taxi dispatch operators made it clear to the OGP that they are not in a position to force individual drivers to purchase accessible vehicles. This matter is largely one of market structure as there are no large unitary fleet operators who can easily be compelled to meet such a requirement.

The most recent figures released by the National Transport Authority (NTA), for 2016, show that 6% of the national taxi fleet is now wheelchair accessible, up from 4.2% in 2013. The NTA has responsibility for increasing the numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the national taxi fleet by means of grants or other initiatives as appropriate.

The OGP continues to monitor the numbers of wheelchair accessible taxis in the national fleet and regularly engages with the National Transport Authority on this matter. When re-tendering for the framework contract for taxi services in the Greater Dublin Area, the OGP will give due consideration to passenger requirements, vehicle accessibility and market statistics at that time. Appropriate and proportionate measures will subsequently be included in the tender process.

Public Private Partnerships

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the planned review of the 10% rule that applies to public private partnerships; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31973/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): PPPs offer an alternative model for delivering infrastructure, that can facilitate the delivery of additional capital projects and that can be effective in particular circumstances. However, the long-term nature of the financial commitments arising under PPPs require that the use of such arrangements must be carefully planned in order to ensure that they are used to address infrastructural needs that are not likely to change over a 25 year period, and do so in a manner that is sustainable in the long term and which the public finances can afford.

It was for this reason that the last Government introduced an Investment Policy Framework for PPPs, in 2015. The purpose of the framework was to set a limit on the extent to which the annual costs of PPPs would pre-commit capital funding available to future Governments for investment purposes, in terms of the overall aggregate Exchequer capital allocation projected to be available in any individual year.

The framework applies to the future cost of unitary payment charges in respect of both existing PPPs already in place and new PPPs currently in procurement or planning, together with the up-front Exchequer costs associated with procuring the planned new PPPs. The current requirement is that, taken together, such future costs in respect of PPPs should not pre-commit more than 10% of the overall aggregate capital funding projected to be available to future Governments in any individual year.

The Deputy will be aware that a mid-term review of the Capital Plan is currently underway, the findings of which will ultimately help Government to put in place a new long term Capital

Plan which is consistent with the new National Planning Framework to be published later this year.

In that context, Government needs to formulate a strategic view on the extent to which PPPs should be used to assist in delivering additional infrastructure, to complement that provided directly with Exchequer funding.

With that in mind, I asked my Department to review our experience of using PPPs and to advise on the scope for further use of this procurement option in the context of the Government's capital investment plans.

A senior level group has been established to assist my Department in this regard, comprising relevant officials from the Departments with experience of procuring projects by PPP, together with the Department of Finance, the National Development Finance Agency and Transport Infrastructure Ireland. This group is reviewing past experience with PPPs and its report, once complete, will provide an evidence based analysis of the potential for further use of PPPs, and concessions, as a procurement option for the delivery of additional capital infrastructure as part of the new long term capital plan. Assessing the affordability, sustainability and value-for-money of PPP procurement will be key elements of the Group's work, while the Group will also have the opportunity to make recommendations in relation to other aspects of PPP policy and guidance, if appropriate.

The report of the Inter-departmental group will help inform a final decision on how to proceed in relation to off-balance sheet PPPs in the context of the new long-term capital plan to be published later this year.

Legal Costs

87. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the circumstances in which he gave approval for the payment of substantially increased daily rates to barristers working on a case (details supplied); the representations that he received in this regard; the rationale for his decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32030/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The case, details supplied by the Deputy, involved allegations concerning substantial loans covering a period of approximately six years. The charges preferred involved (inter alia) breaches of the section 197 of the Companies Act 1990. My officials were advised by the DPP's Office that the case was a difficult and complicated one involving a large number of offences covering an extended time frame coupled with voluminous documentation and involving novel points of law and was the first time section 197 had been prosecuted in the courts. In view of the difficulty and complexity of the case, as advised by the DPP, and the large volume of documentation, fees in excess of the standard Circuit Criminal Court prosecution fees were approved.

Public Procurement Contracts

88. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his attention has been drawn to the increasing concerns of contractors within the construction sector here regarding to the procurement of public contracts due to unfair competition from contractors, particularly from Northern Ireland, which have a lower cost base and continue to gain further advantage with the procurement of building materials and labour in Northern Ireland due to the weakness of sterling; if contractors regardless of their base are obliged to pay the statutory

labour rates here along with other statutory taxes and levies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31441/17]

89. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to protect businesses in the construction sector which are facing unfair competition from contractors, particularly from Northern Ireland, which have a lower cost base and are tendering and gaining public contracts at costs below those viable for contractors based here that meet all their statutory obligations in terms of their business and employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31442/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 and 89 together.

Public procurement is the acquisition, whether under formal contract or not, of works, supplies and services by public bodies. National rules governing public procurement must comply with the relevant EU, WTO and national legal requirements and obligations. Under EU law, public contracts above a certain value must be advertised EU-wide and awarded to the most competitive tender in an open and objective process. The aim of European and national rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money. It would be a breach of the rules for a public body to favour or discriminate against particular candidates on grounds of location or nationality and there are legal remedies which may be used against any public body infringing these rules.

Public procurement procedures require applicants to meet certain standards when applying for public contracts. In this regard applicants are required to make declarations in relation to their financial standing, their legal standing and in relation to payment of taxes and social contributions.

Prior to the award of a public works contract, the successful applicant is also required to produce a current Tax Clearance Certificate from the Revenue Commissioners. Under our national rules, any non-resident contractor being awarded a public contract must provide a Tax Clearance Certificate issued by Revenue confirming that the firm's tax affairs are in order and that it has complied with its tax obligations in this jurisdiction.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that non-resident contractors are obliged to register for and pay relevant taxes for activities carried out in the State. This includes Value Added Tax, Relevant Contracts Tax, Employers PAYE and, depending on the circumstances, Income Tax or Corporation Tax.

- VAT - all non-resident principal contractors (individuals, partnerships and companies) who are engaged in Relevant Contracts in the construction industry in the State must register for VAT and account for VAT under the VAT reverse charge rule. Contractors based in Northern Ireland do not have any advantages over contractors based in Ireland. Full VAT recovery applies to all purchases wherever sourced and VAT is charged and accounted for on their supplies in Ireland.

- Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) applies to payments to subcontractors on construction, operations carried out within the State. RCT applies irrespective of whether the Principal or subcontractor or both are resident outside the State. If the work is being carried out in the State, RCT must be operated.

- Employers PAYE - all employers, including non-resident employers, must register for PAYE as an employer and operate PAYE/PRSI/USC in respect of income attributable to the performance in the State of an employment.

- Income Tax/Corporation Tax - a non-resident contractor which has a permanent establish-

ment which lasts for more than 6 months is liable for Income Tax if a sole trader or Corporation Tax if a company, on the profits arising from the Permanent Establishment. Under Ireland's Double Taxation Agreements the term "Permanent Establishment" expressly includes a building site or construction or installation project.

The management of the tendering process for a public contract is a matter for each contracting authority. It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that tenderers comply with all the requirements of the process.

Once awarded, the conditions of the public works contracts require the contractor to certify compliance with employment law, to maintain records of all those employed on the site, regardless of whether they are employees of the contractor or their subcontractors, and the hours worked by them. Where requested, the contractor must also provide details of the payments made to those employed on the site.

Where the contractor fails to comply with their obligations under the contract or employment law, deductions may be made from payments due under the contract until the situation is rectified.

Enforcement of tax, social welfare and employment law are matters for the relevant State authorities.

All contractors in assessing the viability of a particular contract have to consider their input costs, these include such things as proximity to the works site, availability of skilled labour and material, etc. Exchange rate fluctuation is a risk to be considered when tendering for contracts where payments are to be made in a different currency. Since both domestic and Northern Ireland (N.I.) contractors can source materials in either jurisdiction they are equally able to exploit currency fluctuations to their advantage. Therefore domestic contractors are not necessarily at a competitive disadvantage vis-a-vis the cost of materials.

Competition can work both ways and it is also important to remember that open tendering is a two-way street and that it provides Irish companies with opportunities to compete abroad. The public procurement market in the European Union is estimated to be valued in excess of €1.94 trillion per annum. The open market regime offers opportunities for Irish companies to win business abroad. EU studies indicate that many Irish businesses are successful in this regard.

Heritage Centres

90. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will consider reopening the Kiltyclogher heritage centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31858/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Heritage Centre facility at Kiltyclogher is a locally-run initiative and the Office of Public Works has no responsibility for, or involvement in, its management.

The OPW has made funding available to the Centre in 2016 to support a local guide service to the nearby Sean Mac Dhiarmada Homestead and a similar arrangement is available again, if required.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

91. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to publish the IMF report on infrastructure provision here; when he expects the report to be completed; the terms of reference for the report; if it considers the role of private capital and PPPs; the cost of commissioning this report; the reason for choosing the IMF to carry out such a report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31983/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I assume the Deputy's question refers to the Public Investment Management Assessment (PIMA) which is being carried out by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in July. The possibility of undertaking a PIMA study was raised with me by the IMF during my visit to Washington earlier this year, in the context of a discussion on capital planning in Ireland.

An IMF PIMA evaluates the design and effectiveness of the institutions that shape decision-making at the three key stages of the public investment cycle: planning investment; allocating investment to the right sectors; and implementing investment. The IMF have carried out 17 such assessments to date which are available on the IMF's website www.imf.org. The PIMA for Ireland will be specifically tailored to Ireland's particular needs and will include a focus on, for example,

- A review of our planning and delivery mechanisms and the mechanisms for co-ordinated planning of infrastructural provision across sectors.
- A benchmarking of Ireland's infrastructure by reference to that of other comparable developed countries drawing on the relevant IMF data; and
- An assessment of PPPs and public investment management in State owned entities.

The findings of the PIMA are expected to play an important role in identifying how institutions and public governance systems in Ireland responsible for and related to planning, allocating and delivering public capital infrastructure might be further strengthened. The PIMA dovetails with the ongoing mid-term review of the Capital Plan. The assessment will contribute to the analysis of the systems in place for planning, allocating and delivering future infrastructure priorities, in the context of the preparation of a new long-term Capital Plan to be published later this year.

The full cost of commissioning the report is being borne by the IMF. The PIMA Mission to Ireland is scheduled for 6 to 19 July. The PIMA report will be provided to my Department at the end of the mission and is currently expected to be published later this year as an important input and supporting document to the new 10 year Capital Plan.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

92. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he expects the completion of the expenditure review; the estimated savings that can be made as a result of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31984/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Work on Spending Review 2017 has been ongoing since January of this year. The Mid-Year Expenditure Report (MYER) will include a substantive overview of this process in the coming weeks. In addition, a series of papers will be published with the MYER and will present the results of the analysis of the wide range of expenditure schemes and programmes that have been examined this year. This 2017 Review is the first in a three-year cycle of 'rolling', selective reviews that will examine all day-to-day Departmental spending by 2019. This reflects a change in approach

from the 2011 and 2014 Comprehensive Reviews of Expenditure, which covered all Government expenditure in a single year.

The Spending Review process operates within the wider budgetary architecture and the medium-term expenditure framework, which supports sustainable expenditure policy, anchored by reference to the fiscal rules. The aim of the Spending Review process is not to reduce Departmental expenditure but rather to examine existing spending within this overall budget constraints by reference to the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. By systematically examining baseline expenditure using available evidence and data, the increasing tendency to focus only on the incremental increase in expenditure can be countered. The results of the Spending Review analysis will support budgetary decisions and facilitate the consideration of existing expenditure alongside budgetary proposals.

Public Sector Pensions

93. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the dependants of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare are entitled to increases agreed under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. [32025/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that the deceased person referred to in the Deputy's question was a pensionable public servant, and that a dependant public service pension is payable to his surviving spouse.

The original Lansdowne Road Agreement, whose terms were agreed in 2015 following negotiations between Government and the public service trade unions, does not contain any provisions in relation to pensions.

Section 6.2 of the proposed Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, which if ratified, will be an extension of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, indicates that over the duration of that agreement, policy on public service pensions in payment will be guided by the following three elements:

First, the need to adopt an equitable approach to the various public service pensioner cohorts differentiated by date of retirement (in particular pre and post end-February 2012) is affirmed.

Second, for those who retired or will retire post end-February 2012, to the extent that they retired on reduced salaries for pension award purposes, they will receive pension increases in line with pay increases received by their peers currently in employment in accordance with the terms of the collective agreement.

Third, when alignment is achieved between pre and post end-February 2012 pensioners, as will happen progressively for salary ranges up to €70,000 in 2020 under the proposed collective agreement, pay increases will continue to benefit pensions in payment for the duration of the agreement.

This means that over the period of the agreement, if ratified, public service pensions in payment will increase in line with pay increases where necessary to ensure that those pensions are equal to the pensions being awarded to same-grade retiring staff.

In the context of the Deputy's question, in a scenario where a public service pension qualifies for an increase under the proposed agreement, any related dependant pension will also be increased accordingly.

Education Policy

94. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to put in place alternative education and systems to ensure that young persons (details supplied) who find it difficult to secure a place in education are offered the chance they deserve at completing their education. [31826/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, education is compulsory for children in Ireland from the ages of six to sixteen or until students have completed three years of post-primary education. Key considerations for my Department in this matter is our policy of inclusion, where the objective is for children to be educated within the mainstream system to the greatest extent possible. The policy of my Department is that children with special educational needs should be included where possible and appropriate in mainstream placements with additional supports provided. In circumstances where children with special educational need require more specialised interventions, special school or special class places are also available.

My Department also considers applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme which provides a compensatory educational service to students with a significant medical condition which is likely to cause major disruption to their attendance at school on a continuing basis. Eligibility under this provision is assessed with reference to a completed medical report and attendance records supplied by the school in which the student is enrolled. Further details of the Scheme are available at www.education.ie

Where a problem arises in securing a school place I wish to advise the Deputy that the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, has statutory responsibility to ensure that every child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. Therefore, the Agency, through its Educational Welfare Service, is the statutory body which can assist parents/guardians who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. My colleague the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has responsibility for this Agency.

My Department also funds a range of supports for young people who are at risk of dropping out of school, or who have already become disengaged from the mainstream education system,. These include Youth Encounter Projects, Youthreach Centres, and a number of other centres, including the Centre referred to by the Deputy which receives direct funding. Teaching resources are funded through the Education and Training Boards in many of these local community based settings to support these young people and provide opportunities to them to gain benefit from education.

In relation to the detailed supplied I can confirm that funding from my Department to the Cork Life Centre in 2016 amounted to €159,340.00 consisting of €77,500 in direct funding and €81,840 for teaching resources delivered through Cork ETB.

The DEIS Plan 2017 sets out my Department's vision for education to more fully become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion. One of the goals contained in DEIS Plan 2017 is for a Review of current out of school and second chance provision to inform policy for future supports in this area, including those provided through Tusla. The review will be carried out by my Department, in corporation with Tusla, the Education and Training Boards and Solas, It is expected work on the review will commence over the coming months.

Departmental Staff

95. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason an application for a contract of indefinite duration is being processed and another is not (details supplied), in view of the fact that the two persons that applied for contracts of indefinite duration did not meet the criteria and both were outside the four-week deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31843/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department Officials are unable to identify the applicant from the details supplied with the question. If the Deputy wishes to forward more details of the applicant to my Department the issue raised by the Deputy will be investigated.

Schools Site Acquisitions

96. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a suitable site for a permanent school building will be located for a school (details supplied); the timeframe in which this build will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31848/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from my Department have been working closely with the relevant Local Authorities under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites in order to identify and procure a suitable site for the school.

A number of potential site options have been considered and from these a preferred site option has been identified. Engagement with the relevant landowner in respect of the proposed acquisition is underway.

While a site acquisition process is underway, given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally I am not in a position to comment further at this time.

Once a suitable site has been acquired my Department will be in a position to progress the project concerned into the architectural planning process

School Admissions

97. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe to bring forward legislation to amend section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31849/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Earlier this year I ran a public consultation process and held a Forum on the role of religion in school admissions.

Under the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, which last week passed committee stage, schools which are not oversubscribed will have to accept all applicants. This means that religion will not be used in admissions to 80% of schools.

It is in the 20% other schools that this issue now needs to be addressed.

My preference is to remove the capacity for state-funded denominational primary schools, where they are oversubscribed, to use religion as a criteria in admissions process except, in three scenarios:

- where it would not otherwise be possible to maintain the ethos of the school;

- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to ensure that students of that religion can find a school place in a school of that ethos;

- where the school is established by a minority religion, in order to admit a student of that religion who resides in a community consistently served by that school.

As I have said recently, my intention is to introduce more detailed proposals on this in the autumn, with a view to having them enacted by the end of 2017, depending on the process in the Oireachtas.

Special Educational Needs Staff

98. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the allocations for special needs assistants will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31850/17]

99. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider making the special needs assistants allocations at an earlier date in future to allow schools, parents and special needs assistants adequate time to plan and prepare children for the upcoming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31851/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that this week, I announced that 975 additional SNAs will be available for allocation to schools from September 2017 which is a 7.5% increase to meet the demands for the new school year.

A total of 13,990 SNA posts will now be available at a gross annual cost of €458 million. This is more SNAs than we have ever had previously and will ensure that all children who qualify for SNA support can continue to receive access to such support. In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by over 32% since 2011, when 10,575 posts were available.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2017/18 school year. Details of the allocations which have been made to schools have now been published on www.ncse.ie.

Where a school wishes to make an application for SNA support in respect of a child who was not considered as part of this allocation process they may continue to make such applications to the NCSE.

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.

In response to a progress report from the NCSE on the comprehensive review it is undertaking of the SNA Scheme, I have requested the National Council for Special Education to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing an alternate and improved model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs.

This Working Group will commence its work upon its appointment and the work will run in tandem with the completion of the Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. It is intended that the reports of the Working group and of the Review will be completed early in 2018.

Junior Cycle Reform

100. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there will be flexibility under the new junior cycle Irish framework for schools that wish to prioritise the oral strand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31852/17]

101. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the new junior cycle Irish framework will reduce the percentage of marks for oral Irish at junior cycle level; his views on whether this will have implications for the preparation of children at senior cycle in which the percentage of marks is 40%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31853/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): With effect from September 2017, junior cycle provision for Irish in post-primary schools and settings will comprise two new specifications (syllabuses). The L1 (Language 1, in Irish, Teanga 1) specification is targeted at students in Irish-medium schools and students in English-medium schools who learn one or more subjects (apart from Irish) through the medium of Irish. The L2 (Language 2, Teanga 2) specification is targeted at other students in English-medium schools.

The new Junior Cycle specifications for Irish (both L1 and L2) have a strong emphasis on oral language. This is particularly highlighted in the main strand of the specifications – Communicative Competence. This strand places an enhanced emphasis on Irish as the language of learning and communication in classrooms as well as an emphasis on the skills required to communicate effectively with other users of the language. Communication, opportunities for use and interaction are central to classroom tasks.

A different type of assessment methodology for oral language skills (and other skills) will be used in the new Junior Cycle Irish specification. Up to now, there was an optional oral language test, taken by a minority of students, and generally assessed by their teachers as part of the old Junior Certificate examination. Now, as part of the new Junior Cycle Irish specifications, the oral language skills of all students will be formally assessed. This will be done by means of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) which will be reported by schools to parents at the end of third year in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This emphasis on oral language will ensure students are prepared to undertake the Senior Cycle Programme.

The assessment of oral language skills will no longer be optional. I am satisfied that the new approach ensures that all students will now have the opportunity to benefit from the experience and the value of participating in the assessment of their oral language skills. Unlike the current reporting format in which candidates receive one overall grade based on their achievement in Irish in the Junior Certificate, whether they undertake the optional oral or not, the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement will allow students' achievement in the CBAs to be recorded independently of the result in the state-certified examination. This experience should lead to more motivated, confident and independent language learners and users as they embark on the study of Irish in senior cycle.

Psychological Assessments

102. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide access to a child psychologist for a person (details supplied) in County Cork with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31867/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post-primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological As-

assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

If the parents of the child, the subject of this question, have specific concerns about his educational progress I would advise in the first instance that they speak to the Principal of the school with a view to raising these concerns with the assigned NEPS psychologist in regard to any direct intervention in the case.

Schools Building Projects Data

103. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the schools within the schools building programme 2016 to 2021 which have commenced; the schools due to be completed in 2017; the projects which have gone to tender; the projects which have gone to construction, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31868/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The 6 year construction programme 2016-2021 included 310 projects for new schools and extension/refurbishment of existing schools.

The attached listings show respectively the projects from the 2016-2021 building programme that have reached practical completion, are currently on-site or are at tender stage.

There are currently 20 major projects from the 2016-2021 building programme on-site working towards completion and it is envisaged that 7 of these projects will be completed in 2017.

A further 8 projects from the 2016-2021 building programme are currently progressing through tender stage and are expected to start on site by late this year.

In addition, a total of 51 further large scale projects from the 5 year construction programme 2012-2016 also remained under construction at the beginning of 2017.

Projects On-site from 2016-2021 School Building Programme

County	Roll No	School	Commenced On-Site	Estimated Completion
Clare	19559L	Chroisti Ri Ennis	16/06/2017	2018

County	Roll No	School	Commenced On-Site	Estimated Completion
Carlow	70420R	Tyndall College Campus PPP	22-Jul-16	2018
Cavan	76313A	Dun Na Rí	08-Jun-16	2017
Dublin	13815T	Howth Road Mixed NS, Clontarf	04/10/2016	2017
Dublin	18778S	SN Naomh Mochta, Clonsilla	10/04/2017	2018
Dublin	68262N	Bremore Educate Together, Balbriggan (20269J)	28-Sep-15	2017
Dublin	19032R	Stewarts Hospital Special School, Palmerstown, Dublin 20	02/05/2017	2018
Galway	17807R	Cahergal NS	22/08/2016	2017
Galway	12954F	SN Bhríde, Lackagh	14/11/2016	2018
Kildare	20428D	St. Joseph's NS, Gorey	29/03/2017	2017
Longford	14386E	Stonepark National School	30/09/2016	2017
Louth	91441T	Ardee Community School	01/11/2016	2018
Louth	14069P	Dun Dealgan NS, Dundalk	28/11/2016	2018
Meath	19813W	Kildalkey Central NS	12/06/2017	2018
Meath	64410F	Eureka Secondary School, Kells PPP	22-Jul-16	2018
Waterford	19108B	St Martin's Special School, Ballintuckle	20/06/2016	2017
Wexford	63660A	Loreto Secondary School, Wexford Town PPP	22-Jul-16	2018
Wexford	18280I	St. Joseph's NS Creagh	02/05/2017	2018
Wicklow	70821M	Coláiste Raithin, Bray PPP	22-Jul-16	2018
Wicklow	07246U	Scoil Philomena, Bray	22/07/2016	2018

Projects at Tender from 2016-2021 School Building Programme

County	Roll No	School	Stage	Estimated Completion
Clare	16908S	Sixmilebridge NS	At Tender	2018
Cork	14839P	Clondrohid NS, Macroom	At Tender	2018
Dublin	76293U	Kingswood Post Primary, Tallaght, Dublin 24	At Tender	2019
Dublin	76213T	Lusk Community College - Phase II	At Tender	2019
Galway	18746F	Monivea NS, Galway	At Tender	2018
Galway	62870G	Presentation College Athenry	At Tender	2019
Louth	16208N	Termonfeckin Mixed NS	At Tender	2018
Mayo	64660F	Sancta Maria College, Louisburg	At Tender	2019

Special Educational Needs Staff

104. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the allocation of special needs assistants and resource teacher hours is expected to be announced in view of the fact that the delay is causing considerable difficulty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31870/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that this week, I announced that 975 additional SNAs will be available for allocation to schools from September 2017 which is a 7.5% increase to meet the demands for the new school year.

A total of 13,990 SNA posts will now be available at a gross annual cost of €458 million. This is more SNAs than we have ever had previously and will ensure that all children who qualify for SNA support can continue to receive access to such support. In total, the number of SNAs available has increased by over 32% since 2011, when 10,575 posts were available.

The National Council for Special Education has advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2017/18 school year. Details of the allocations which have been made to schools have now been published on their website www.ncse.ie.

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.

Where a school wishes to make an application for SNA support in respect of a child who was not considered as part of this allocation process they may continue to make such applications to the NCSE.

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.

In response to a progress report from the NCSE on the comprehensive review it is undertaking of the SNA Scheme, I have requested the National Council for Special Education to establish a working group, comprising relevant stakeholders, to assist in proposing an alternate and improved model for providing care supports so as to provide better outcomes for students with special educational needs who have additional care needs.

This Working Group will commence its work upon its appointment and the work will run in tandem with the completion of the Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme. It is intended that the reports of the Working group and of the Review will be completed early in 2018.

Child Care Services Provision

105. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties facing a group (details supplied) in Donaghmede in trying to find a permanent home for the child care training and counselling services it provides; and if he will arrange to meet representatives of the group to discuss its future plans. [31899/17]

106. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports his Department can provide for groups such as a group (details supplied) that provide invaluable education and training for its local community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31900/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I am familiar with the group in question and the excellent services they provide in the local community. I am aware that the group are having difficulties sourcing suitable accommodation.

I have convened a meeting for later this week between the group and relevant stakeholders which I will attend to consider what options might be available to accommodate the group.

Schools Building Projects Status

107. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the new building for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31903/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that a building project for the school referred to is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021). The progression of a building project for the school requires the acquisition of a site.

My Department has been working closely with Wexford County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites in order to identify and procure a suitable site for the school.

A number of potential site options have been identified and these are currently under consideration.

While a site acquisition process is underway, given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to comment further at this time.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

108. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of reversing the cuts to the school staffing ratio in smaller schools which was introduced in budget 2012. [31961/17]

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

Budget 2012 increased the appointment and retention ratios for small schools (i.e., schools with up to four classroom teachers). Improvements to the staffing of these schools were announced for the 2015/16 school year. These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for one-teacher schools situated 8km or more from the nearest school of the same type of patronage and/or language of instruction.

In addition, Budget 2016 announced a 1 point improvement to the primary staffing schedule. The improved staffing schedule which is available on the Department website will be implemented for the 2016/17 school year.

Following a review of the staffing allocation for Small Primary Schools, Budget 2017 announced two adjustments in relation to one teacher schools. Where the school is the sole primary school on an island the school will be able to appoint a second teacher. In relation to single teacher schools generally with an enrolment of 15 or more pupils the school can apply to the staffing appeal board for a second post where the single teacher has children across 6 or more class groups.

Skills Shortages

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of education provisions to meet the skill requirements in the areas of science and technology with particular reference to growing and competitive demands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31993/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Action Plan for Education and the National Skills Strategy detail clear curriculum change and other commitments that will secure the step-change needed to equip learners with the skills necessary to participate in the modern economy.

In relation to Science and Technology I expect to publish shortly a STEM education policy statement and implementation plan which will detail actions to promote STEM at primary and post-primary levels. The Action Plan also details further curricular reform actions to assist access to jobs in the modern economy. These include the introduction of a new Leaving Certificate computer science subject from September 2018 and the development of a new primary mathematics curriculum which will support all children in the development of algorithmic and computational thinking which form the basis of coding.

As part of the Framework for Junior Cycle a new Science specification was introduced in September 2006, while the new Mathematics specification will be implemented from September 2018. A short course on coding is also in place.

I also recently announced an ambitious implementation plan to activate the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020. The plan contains a number of actions that will help realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment to help students become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens.

Apprenticeship Programmes

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which apprenticeships under the various headings are being provided for with particular reference to the need as indicated from the workplace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31994/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the deputy is aware, the Apprenticeship Council is currently overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new sectors of the economy. Following its first call for proposals in 2015, the Apprenticeship Council has been working closely with consortia to develop their proposals into sustainable apprenticeships. Last year we saw the first of these new programmes with the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship getting underway in November. Last month three further new programmes got underway, two in the medical devices area and a polymer processing apprenticeship. A further 10 programmes are expected to get underway later this year in various sectors including hospitality, financial services and accountancy.

In January this year we published the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, which sets out a series of detailed actions and annual targets on how the commitments set out in the Action Plan for Education in the area will be met.

A key commitment set out in the Plan for this year was the issuing of a second call for apprenticeship proposals to refresh the pipeline of proposals already established through the first call. The second call issued on 4 May and will remain open until 1 September.

As well as developments in new apprenticeships, registrations in the craft trades are rising as the employment and economic situation improves. In 2016 there were 3,742 registrations which represents a significant recovery since the crash. This year the upward trend continues with registrations at the end of June of 2,200 which is almost 40% ahead of the same period in 2016. Registrations in the craft trades are predicted to grow to 5,587 over the period to 2020

Education Policy

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of provisions in respect of school places, teachers and academic staff at primary, second and third level throughout the country; the extent to which potential deficiencies have been provided and are likely to be provided for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31995/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In looking at how to meet competing demands across the education and training system within the resources available to my Department, I must take a targeted and balanced approach to directing investment. My aim is to progressively deliver on the ambitions and objectives of the Programme for Government, the Confidence and Supply Arrangement and the Action Plan for Education.

As part of Budget 2017, I secured additional investment of over €458 million for the education and training system. Among other things, this will facilitate the creation of over 2,500 additional posts in schools, including more classroom teachers, more resource teachers and more special needs assistants. It has allowed for continued restoration of guidance posts in schools. It provides support for school leadership. It supports the roll-out of the DEIS Plan 2017 to deliver equality of opportunity in schools. It has allowed the first new Exchequer current investment in higher education since the beginning of the financial crisis. Some 20,000 school places will also be provided for through the Department's capital allocation of €690m.

Special Educational Needs Staff

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which special needs teaching requirements are being met throughout the primary and second level education system; if shortfalls have been identified; the procedures in place to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31996/17]

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

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

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

The new Special Education Teaching allocation provides a single unified allocation for spe-

cial educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile.

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

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

No school will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

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

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

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs have also now been published.

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

Autism Support Services

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which requirements in respect of children with autism are being met in County Kildare with particular reference to persons previously having difficulty in obtaining a school place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31997/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

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

The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE policy advice notes that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

It follows therefore that, where they are able, students should be given every opportunity to participate in mainstream settings and only be enrolled/retained in special class and/or special school settings where their levels of need warrant this.

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

- 61% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 13% to attend special schools.

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

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

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

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

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,152 across the country now, of which 888 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

The NCSE will establish an additional 174 Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year of which 145 will be ASD classes. The NCSE intend to open an additional 4 special classes in Kildare for the 2017/18 school year, consisting of 1 Primary ASD special class, 2 Post Primary ASD special classes and 1 Post Primary Moderate GLD special class.

With regard to Kildare in particular there are 942 students with ASD attending schools in the County. Of these, 520 students attend mainstream schools and are accessing in-school supports including Resource teaching and SNA support.

322 students are attending 59 ASD special classes, including 6 early intervention classes, 41 primary ASD classes and 12 post primary ASD classes. A further 100 students with ASD are placed in 4 special schools. The number of ASD classes has increased in the area by 24% since the 2013/14 school year.

The NCSE has informed my Department that they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand in schools in the area referred to by the Deputy for the forthcoming school year and that they will continue to monitor demand and review the requirement for special class places.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

My Departments Planning and Building Unit has advised that Special Needs Units (SNUs) are currently under construction at 3 schools including St Conleth's Vocational School, Newbridge, Ard Scoil na Trionoide, Athy and Ballymanny Junior NS, Newbridge.

In addition, major building projects for a number of Post Primary schools in Kildare are included on the Department's 6 Year Construction Plan, and Special Needs units (SNUs) will be included in these Developments.

The schools in question are:

- St Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin
- Naas Community College, Naas
- Cross & Passion College, Kilcullen
- Athy Community College
- St Farnan's Post Primary, Prosperous
- Patrician Post-Primary, Newbridge

During the passage of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill in the Select Committee last week I indicated that I intend, at Report Stage, to include in this Bill a provision that will provide, based on reports and advice from the NCSE, the Minister will have the power to require a school to open a special class or increase the number of special classes in schools identified by the NCSE. Because this power will require a school to provide land or alter existing property I am of the view that the power should be with the Minister who can engage the patron or trustees and that there should be adequate safeguards to ensure people's rights are protected.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, are available on www.ncse.ie in county order.

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs teaching posts available throughout primary and second level schools in County Kildare; the extent of the full requirements in this specific area; the provisions likely to be made in response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31998/17]

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the number of special needs teachers throughout the country and specifically in County Kildare is adequate to meet the demand in all schools; if changes are required in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32002/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114 and 118 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department's Circulars 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7 March 2017.

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

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

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

Allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7 March, including those in Co. Kildare.

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

No school will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

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

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

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs have also now been published.

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

Schools Building Projects Administration

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level throughout the country with particular reference to the need to meet demographic pressures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31999/17]

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme in County Kildare needs upgrading to address the needs arising from demographic pressure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32000/17]

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which he expects to be in a position to replace unfit classroom accommodation at primary and second level schools throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32003/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115, 116 and 119 together.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. My Department is currently in the process of completing demographic exercises nationwide. This process is detailed and rigorous and will take some time to complete. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

My Department's six year Capital Programme priorities building projects to meet demographic demand and this includes schools in County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms, if required, for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

As the Deputy is aware, there are currently 29 major capital projects being progressed in County Kildare, details of which were provided to the Deputy previously. This is in addition to the smaller scale projects that have been approved devolved funding under my Department's additional accommodation scheme. Details of these projects may be viewed on my Department's website www.education.ie which is updated regularly.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that it is my intention, in accordance with the Programme

for Government to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established, over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme (2016-2021). To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

It is intended that this assessment, when finalised, will enable the replacement of such prefabs to commence in 2019. A funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 for this initiative in the programme.

School Transport Provision

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to address the issues arising from changes in school transport provisions in north County Kildare which has severely disadvantaged some persons; if arrangements can be put in place to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32001/17]

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

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

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

Changes to the eligibility criteria for this Scheme were announced in December 2010 as part of measures contained in Budget 2011 and derived from recommendations contained in a comprehensive Value for Money review of the scheme. In general, these changes mean that children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

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

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge.

It is important that the terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 114.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 115.

Psychological Assessments

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which psychological assessments are accessible as required in the primary and second level sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32004/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution focused consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

I would advise that if there are concerns in relation to the educational or social and emotional development of any student these should be raised by the parents, in the first instance, with the Principal of the school he/she is attending, with a view to Principal discussing the situation with the assigned NEPS psychologist or local NEPS service.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios continue to improve arising from the steps taken over the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32005/17]

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.

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. There is no change in relation to the staffing schedule of 27:1 that will apply to primary schools for the 2017/18 school year. The staffing schedule for post primary will be 19:1 for the 2017/18 school year. The Guidance al-

location which is equivalent to 0.4:1 in the staffing schedule is being provided separately.

The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase of over 4,800 in teacher numbers in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

The Confidence and Supply Agreement and 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. However, I recognize that there are needs across the system which have to be balanced in the decisions made in each Budget.

Digital Strategy for Schools

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which etechnology has become available to all schools at primary and second level throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32006/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 (Enhancing Teaching, Learning & Assessment), launched in October 2015, sets out a clear vision that is focused on realising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experience of students by helping them become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens who participate fully in society and the economy.

This policy document sets out a plan to embed ICT in teaching learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools through an ambitious programme of works for the period 2015-2020 across a number of headings:

Theme 1: Teaching, Learning and Assessment Using ICT

Theme 2: Teacher Professional Development

Theme 3: Leadership, Research and Policy

Theme : ICT Infrastructure

An evidence-based approach was used to develop the Strategy, including an analysis of the 2013 online census of teachers and principals (available at http://www.erc.ie/documents/ict_cencus2013_summaryreport.pdf). The survey showed that teachers and schools are positively disposed to using ICT and are reasonably well resourced in that regard but there remains some challenges in the areas of connectivity at primary level and in training and development. The four Themes emerged as a roadmap for the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment.

The implementation of the Strategy is currently underway. A detailed Action Plan for 2017 was recently launched, based on the objectives outlined in the Digital Strategy. Timelines and lead responsibility have been assigned. Progress on implementation will be reviewed on a quarterly basis and an end of year 2017 progress report will be published. The Action Plan is available on my Department's website at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Digital-Strategy-Action-Plan-2017.pdf>. The Plan for 2017 has some key elements:

- The scoping of an innovative clustering model across the country to innovate, harness good practice and create pathways for accelerated collaborative innovation by schools

- A programme of curriculum reforms will see ICT embedded in all emerging curricular

specifications and intense preparation for the phased introduction of Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject option from 2018

- The localization of the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework through the development of a Digital Learning Framework that will give clarity to teachers and schools around the concept of embedding ICT into teaching, learning and assessment. This Framework will help schools and teachers to identify training needs that can be targeted by my Department and its Support Services. The Framework will be made available to all schools from September 2017.

- Provide information to teachers on innovative ways to use digital technologies more actively in their own teaching, including exemplars of good practice, and facilitating the sharing of such practices amongst teachers.

- All professional development supports provided by my Department's Support Services will embed digital technologies and constructivism both in design, development and delivery

Funding of €210m has been committed towards the implementation of the Digital Strategy. The first tranche of this funding, €30m, issued earlier this year to some 3,158 primary and special schools and 666 post primary schools for the upgrade of ICT infrastructure. The need to provide funding for this purpose was highlighted in the Census analysis. The criteria for funding provides that each school is expected to draw up an eLearning Plan using a whole school approach and taking account of its context and circumstances. The Plan will outline the vision of the school for the embedding of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment and incorporates targets and priorities for improvement and development.

Presently, all schools in the country are offered a broadband internet connection to promote and facilitate the use of eLearning Technology. There is a vast array of internet-based digital tools in use in classrooms, including Interactive Whiteboards, laptops, desktop computers, projectors, tablet computers, software packages and apps, visualisation and mapping tools, digital content and resources.

The decision on which digital tool to use to best support teaching and learning in the implementation of the curriculum is made by each individual school. The emphasis will now however be on the use of these digital tools to effectively embed ICT in teaching, learning and assessment in line with the Digital Strategy.

The PDST Technology in Education provides a range of support services for schools on the effective use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment through a variety of means including workshops, blended learning CPD courses, good practice videos, advice on ICT equipment and digital learning tools. It is part of the national support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers and operates under the remit of my Department. It also manages the Department's on-line Education Portal Scoilnet.ie which is a key source of online high quality digital content made available for all schools and facilitates sharing of digital resources and good classroom practice between teachers. The website provides in excess of 12,000 + resources aligned with the primary School Curriculum and the Post Primary Subject Syllabus.

School Patronage

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which smaller, rural or urban schools under the control of religious authorities are likely to remain protected in line with their religious ethos; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32007/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is very aware of the importance of small schools to rural communities and particularly the most dispersed and remote communities.

To sustain primary schools in these communities my Department has a more favourable staffing schedule for small schools that are more than 8km distant from the next nearest school of the same type of patronage and language of instruction. This measure is designed to provide rural communities with security about the future of their small schools.

With regard to school ethos, the government supports the concept of parental choice in our school system, whether that be a choice for denominational or multi-denominational education.

In regard to retaining small schools, a specific commitment is given in the Programme for a Partnership Government not to close any small school without the consent of parents. I am mindful of the concerns of small schools and will take these into account in considering any planning for future provision.

Third Level Education

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which third level education requires ongoing assessment and updating in line with best practice internationally to ensure the ability of graduates to compete internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32008/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher Education Institutions, which have primary responsibility for the quality of their course provision, have quality assurance procedures in place, having had regard to Guidelines from Quality and Qualifications Ireland. In addition to encompassing regular periodic reviews of study programmes, institutions are also encouraged to undertake quality reviews of academic, administrative and service departments and, depending on structure, unit-based reviews of schools, faculties and colleges. Institutions may also undertake thematic reviews of institution-wide issues.

The Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report provides QQI inter alia with a listing an institutions cycle of internal reviews along with links to published review reports. QQI has also established a Policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions, which take place on a periodic scheduled basis.

The support for teaching and learning is a central pillar of the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 and the promotion of ‘excellence in teaching and learning to underpin a high-quality student experience’ is one of the 7 ‘key system objectives’ in the Higher Education System Performance Framework.

The establishment in 2012 of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at third level provided a key, system-level infrastructure for the support of the implementation of the National Strategy in respect of the teaching mission of higher education.

The National Forum aims to ensure that opportunities for better practice are identified, mainstreamed and shared under the guidance of the Higher Education Authority and sectoral representative bodies. The National Forum’s Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015–2017 and the Professional Development Framework are just two national initiatives developed for the sector. Its partnerships with students through for example, the Teaching Heroes Awards scheme, has significantly advanced the objective of enhancing student-engagement in higher education. The National Forum therefore supports at national level the ongoing updat-

ing of teaching and learning in third level institutions in line with best practice internationally.

Autism Support Services

125. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by the family of a person (details supplied) in accessing an available space in an autism spectrum disorder unit for the person to attend in September 2017; the number of other persons and families in a similar situation in this locality; and his plans to address this ongoing difficulty. [32020/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,152 across the country now, of which 888 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

special classes.

The NCSE intend to establish an additional 145 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year. Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, are available on www.ncse.ie in county order.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

During the passage of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill in the Select Committee last week I indicated that I intend, at Report Stage, to include in this Bill a provision that will provide, based on reports and advice from the NCSE, the Minister will have the power to require a school to open a special class or increase the number of special classes in schools identified by the NCSE. Because this power will require a school to provide land or alter existing property I am of the view that the power should be with the Minister who can engage the patron or trustees and that there should be adequate safeguards to ensure people's rights are protected.

As the enrolment of a child to a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school, my Department has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools and it does not maintain details of waiting lists in schools.

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

My officials have been informed by the NCSE that the local SENO, Educational Welfare Officer and parent are meeting next week to discuss placement options for the child referred to by the Deputy,

However as the question relates to an individual child, the matter has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

European Council Meetings

126. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Egypt was discussed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 6 March 2017; and if so, if he raised the case of a person (details supplied). [31830/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): EU Foreign Affairs ministers discussed EU-Egypt relations with the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sameh Shoukry, in a meeting in Brussels on 6 March 2017 on the margins of the EU Foreign Affairs Council.

My predecessor, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Minister Charlie Flanagan, attended those meeting and sought and secured a separate one-one-one meeting with his Egyptian counterpart on that occasion specifically to raise the case to which the Deputy refers.

Minister Flanagan restated forcefully the strong humanitarian arguments for this Irish citizen to be released, including his youth, isolation, separation from family and the long period for which he has been imprisoned without having been convicted of any wrongdoing. Minister

Flanagan also raised concerns about this young man's welfare and conditions of detention.

The Egyptian Minister undertook to follow up in order to ensure that our citizen receive all necessary medical treatment and that his conditions are satisfactory.

Minister Shoukry restated that the Egyptian Government must respect the separation of powers and cannot intervene in a case while it remains before the courts. The Egyptian Minister emphasised that the case is very firmly on the Egyptian President's desk, and remained there because of the regular engagement from the Irish Government.

Human Rights

127. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the date on which the EU-Egypt partnership priorities are due to be published and adopted; if a person's case (details supplied) was raised by his Department during the negotiations of these partnership priorities; and the way in which they will ensure that human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Egypt will be safeguarded. [31831/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The EU and Egypt will adopt their partnership priorities for 2017-2020 at the next Association Council, which is due to take place later this year.

The case of the individual mentioned was not raised by my Department during the negotiations of these partnership priorities. Negotiations of partnership priorities are of a technical nature and I do not believe that to link these negotiations with the case of the individual mentioned would further the interests of the Irish citizen involved. The matter is being pursued bilaterally.

The proposed priorities make it clear that Human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as set out in international human rights law, the Treaty on European Union and the Egyptian Constitution – are a common value and constitute the cornerstone of a modern democratic state. They commit Egypt and the EU to promoting democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights as constitutional rights of all citizens, in line with their international obligations.

Military Aircraft

128. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 261 of 29 June 2017, the advice or response given by his Department in respect of the 135 flights that landed at Shannon Airport with troops and weapons on board between January and May 2017 and the 229 overflights in Irish airspace with munitions on board in that period. [31855/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has primary responsibility for the regulation of civil aircraft.

Civil aircraft are prohibited from carrying weapons or munitions of war through Irish airspace and airports unless an exemption has been obtained in advance from the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. In considering requests made by commercial carriers, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport seeks the advice of other Departments, including my Department on any foreign policy issues that may arise.

In considering such requests, my Department will examine the nature of the munitions that

it is proposed to carry based on the information provided by the airline in writing to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport when an exemption is sought. My Department generally recommends against granting exemptions to carry munitions of war except for flights carrying troops and their unloaded personal weapons.

My Department's provision of advice to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in respect of such requests is guided by and accords with Ireland's longstanding policy of military neutrality.

EU Migration Crisis

129. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the new steps the EU will take to safeguard the human rights of migrants in Libya; if official EU inspections of the human rights conditions in detention centres will take place; if proper systems of registering persons held in detention centres will be implemented in view of the concerns raised regarding the treatment of migrants in Libya at the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 19 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32027/17]

130. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on whether it is right for the EU to continue to fund the Libyan coast guard service following reports of the Libyan coast guard physically abusing migrants at sea in view of the evidence of appalling humanitarian conditions in the detention centres to which migrants are returned by the Libyan coast guard and the concerns raised regarding the treatment of migrants in Libya at the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 19 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32028/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 129 and 130 together.

I share the Deputy's concerns about the conditions that many migrants are facing in Libya. The EU collectively, as well as member states working alone, have been working hard to try to improve conditions on the ground.

The political situation in Libya remains complex. No single government has controlled Libya since the fall of Colonel Gaddafi, and at the present time there are a number of competing governments in Libya, none of which control more than a portion of the territory. As a result the humanitarian, economic and security situation is precarious and complicates EU engagement with the Libyan authorities, including on migration. The formation of a functioning government in Libya is therefore a central objective for the EU, and will be a critical step towards addressing the migration crisis in the Mediterranean.

At their summit meeting in March, EU Heads of State and Government set out the EU's commitment to assist Libya in their Malta Declaration. That commitment is broad-ranging including capacity building, training, and the provision of equipment and support for the Libyan national coast guard and other agencies. It also seeks to ensure that there are adequate reception capacities in Libya for migrants, including through working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

In April, the EU approved a €90 million programme to step up protection of migrants and to reinforce migration management in Libya. A key objective is to provide multi-sectoral assistance and protection to migrants, refugees and host communities in different locations inside Libya, in particular inside detention centres, at disembarkation points and in urban settings. This programme is being implemented through a number of international agencies including

the UNHCR and UNICEF. The €90m is in addition to the €120 million already announced by the EU for migration-related support for Libya.

Individual EU member states are also addressing the migration situation in Libya. The Interior ministers of France, Germany and Italy along with the European Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, met in Paris on 2 July and agreed, *inter alia*, to enhance support to the Libyan coastguard by increasing training activities and providing additional financial support while at the same time ensuring close monitoring of activities and to provide additional support to the IOM and the UNHCR to enable facilities in Libya to reach international standards in terms of living conditions and human rights. They also agreed to accelerate the EU Relocation scheme agreed in 2015.

Ireland has been playing its part in trying to address the migration crisis through voluntarily opting into the EU Relocation scheme; giving generous humanitarian assistance to countries housing large numbers of migrants and through our naval presence in the Mediterranean. As regards Libya specifically, for the past two years Irish Aid has deployed two Rapid Responders from its Rapid Response Corps to the UNICEF Libya Country Office based in Tunis to support UNICEF's work with migrants.

Citizenship Status

131. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans in respect of advising UK citizens living here about their citizenship status once the Brexit negotiations are complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32053/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The outcome of any Brexit negotiations will not affect the citizenship status of persons, including UK citizens, residing in the State. It is however open to any individual who may wish to become an Irish citizen to lodge an application for citizenship through naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory conditions as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the grant of citizenship through naturalisation. The statutory conditions are that the applicant must -

- be of full age,
- be of good character,
- have had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a further total residence in the State amounting to four years,
- intend in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation,
- have, before a judge of the District Court in open court, in a citizenship ceremony or in such manner as the Minister, for special reasons, allows -
 - (i) made a declaration, in the prescribed manner, of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and
 - (ii) undertaken to faithfully observe the laws of the State and to respect its democratic values.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains

guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation. Under Irish law it is possible for an Irish citizen to hold dual citizenship; the acquisition of Irish citizenship is not contingent on the renunciation of the citizenship of another jurisdiction.

As the Deputy is aware, it is our intention to maintain the existing arrangements with regard to the United Kingdom, and the Government position is to protect the Common Travel Area arrangements. As outlined, the grant of Irish citizenship is a national competency and there are no current plans to amend the legislation. There are also no plans to change the current position regarding the Common Travel Area in advance of knowing what will be the ultimate arrangements relating to the UK withdrawal from the EU. Should an issue arise in this area during any negotiations between the UK and the other EU member states, the position will be revisited at that stage.

Citizenship Applications

132. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to waiver the application fee for citizenship applications in relation to UK citizens married to Irish citizens that are residing here for longer than five years. [32054/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The fees to be paid by an applicant for a certificate of naturalisation are governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 569 of 2011). The application fee, stipulated at €175, is payable on application for a certificate of naturalisation and a certification fee is payable on the issue of a certificate of naturalisation. The standard certification fee is set at €950, while a reduced fee of €200 applies in the case of an application made on behalf of a minor or in certain cases where the application is made by a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of an Irish citizen. In the case of recognised refugees and stateless persons the certification fee is nil.

There is no provision in the Regulations for the discretionary waiver or reduction of fees, or for differing fees to apply to different nationalities. All of the fees payable under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended are kept under ongoing review by my Department; however, there are no plans to amend the fees.

The standard fees payable by an applicant are designed to reflect the effort and cost involved in processing applications for a certificate of naturalisation. The Deputy will be aware that formal citizenship ceremonies have been introduced at no extra cost to applicants. These have been universally well received by participants as the ceremonies provide a sense of dignity and occasion that serves to underscore the importance to both the State and the applicant of the granting of Irish citizenship.

Assisted Decision Making

133. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe for the Assisted Decision Making Bill 2015 to be fully implemented and all sections duly enacted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32055/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 provides a modern statutory framework to support decision-making by adults with capacity difficulties. The Act was signed into law on 30 December 2015.

New administrative processes and support measures, including the setting up of the Decision Support Service within the Mental Health Commission, must be put in place before the substantive provisions of the Act can be commenced. A high-level Steering Group comprised of senior officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Courts Service is overseeing the establishment and commissioning of the Decision Support Service (DSS) and this work is ongoing.

The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (Commencement of Certain Provisions) Order 2016 (S.I. No. 515 of 2016), brought some provisions of Part 1 (Preliminary and General) and Part 9 (Director of the Decision Support Service) of the Act into operation on 17 October 2016. These provisions were brought into operation in order to progress the setting up of the Decision Support Service and to enable the process of recruitment of the Director of the DSS to begin. The recruitment and appointment of the Director of the DSS, and the appointment of DSS staff, is a matter for the Mental Health Commission (a body under the Department of Health) with the approval of the Minister for Health.

It is intended that the key preparations will be put in place during the remainder of this year under the oversight of the Steering Group to allow for commencement orders for the remaining provisions of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 to be made when the Decision Support Service is ready to roll out the new decision-making support options. It is not possible at the moment to provide an exact time line for the finalisation of these commencement orders, not least because we will need to have the Director of the DSS in place to fully ascertain the time-line. The post of Director was advertised by the Public Appointments Service on 7 April and it is expected that the Director will be in place during the summer.

Garda Civilian Staff Recruitment

134. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for the recruitment of cleaning and ancillary staff in the Garda Training College, Templemore to cater for the increasing numbers of trainees attending the college in the months ahead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31832/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the recruitment of cleaning and ancillary staff for the Garda College and I, as Minister, have no direct role in this matter. I understand that Garda management keeps the matter under continual review.

I am informed by the Commissioner there are 48.8 cleaners and ancillary staff employed in the College and that arrangements are in train to fill a supervisory position for the cleaning staff.

Garda Vetting Applications

135. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 96 of 9 May 2017, if he will provide an update on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31857/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The vetting application concerned in this case relates to a person who is an ongoing application for employment in An Garda Síochána. As was indicated to the Deputy in correspondence following the reply to Question No. 96 of 9 May 2017, the Garda Authorities can liaise directly with the individual concerned with regard to the particular case.

Council of Europe

136. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps he will take in response to the criticisms by the Council of Europe's anti-corruption body, GRECO, regarding Ireland's record in tackling corruption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31954/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 29 June 2017, GRECO, the Council of Europe Anti-Corruption Body published a Report on Ireland's level of compliance with the fourth Round of Mutual Evaluations theme "Corruption Prevention in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors". Ireland had been evaluated in 2014 and received 11 recommendations. The compliance report which was adopted in March 2017 was disappointing and Ireland was found to have only satisfactorily implemented 3 out of 11 recommendations.

GRECO was satisfied that Ireland had implemented the one recommendation in relation to prosecutors. In relation to members of parliament, GRECO found that Ireland was partly compliant and the enactment of the Public Sector Standards Bill will ensure a much higher level of compliance going forward. My colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform is progressing this Bill through the legislative process currently. In relation to the judiciary, Ireland was deemed to have implemented none of the five recommendations. Since this report was adopted, however, the Government has published both the Judicial Council Bill and the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, and the enactment of these two Bills will substantially address these recommendations.

Ireland had been asked to report again to the Council of Europe by 31 March 2018 on the outstanding recommendations and I am committed to achieving a significantly better result next time around. With that in mind, I have established a senior officials compliance committee to work through the various recommendations and to ensure that progress continues to be made on implementing both legislative and administrative recommendations.

Very soon, I will also be publishing a Criminal Justice (Corruption Offences) Bill, which will repeal and replace the seven previous Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 to 2010 and will introduce some additional offences. The Bill will clarify the liability of corporate bodies for corruption offences. It will extend the range of penalties available to a court when a person is convicted to include forfeiture of public office in certain circumstances. The Bill will make renewed provision for the main requirements of a number of international anti-corruption instruments which Ireland has already ratified, and it will provide for recommendations made in the course of evaluations of Ireland by the various European and International Bodies, including GRECO.

Immigration Status

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the required documentation has been submitted in the case of a person (details supplied) who is seeking to regularise their residency status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32032/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Immigration Status

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which residency status can be upgraded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32034/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is currently registered in the State under Stamp 3 conditions as they are the dependant of a non-EEA national. It will be open to this person to apply for a Stamp 4 on the basis of family dependence of an Irish national if, in the future, either of their parents becomes an Irish National.

The person mentioned by the Deputy should be directed to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service website www.inis.gov.ie to explore alternative ways of obtaining a Stamp 4 in their own right. A letter to this effect, dated 29 June 2017, issued to the person concerned from the Family Dependent Unit.

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

Immigration Status

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in regard to the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied). [32035/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the persons referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, which governs the granting of Irish citizenship

through naturalisation.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Immigration Status

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress in regard to the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied), the holder of stamp 3 status seeking to upgrade to stamp 4; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32036/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the first named person concerned has permission to remain in the State until 4 November, 2018 on immigration Stamp 4 conditions. The second named person concerned has been granted permission to remain in the State, on immigration Stamp 3 conditions, for the period to 4 November 2018. These decisions were conveyed in writing to the persons concerned by letters dated 27 October, 2015.

The decision to grant such status was arrived at following the detailed consideration of the respective cases of the persons concerned and their family members under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This decision was made with due regard for all information and documentation on file at the time.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service would be prepared to review the case of the second named person concerned in circumstances where they presented documentary evidence to show that they had a concrete offer of paid employment available to them. The Deputy will appreciate that any such offer of paid employment must be on the prospective employer's headed paper; it must describe the specific position being offered; it must set out the proposed salary or salary scale; it must provide an indication that any such position is available immediately, is whole-time and is not subject to seasonal factors. Upon receipt of documentary evidence of the nature described above, INIS will undertake a review of the case of the person concerned.

I am further advised by INIS that to date, no applications for certificates of naturalisation have been received from the persons referred to by the Deputy.

It will be open to the persons concerned to apply to the Citizenship Section of my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation when the persons concerned are in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to the lodgement of such applications. Details on the criteria to be met by persons lodging such applications are available from my Department's website (www.justice.ie).

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

Immigration Status

141. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and eligibility for upgrade in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32037/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has not submitted written representations.

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

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

Immigration Status

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expected residency status and or eligibility for upgrade, including naturalisation, in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32038/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy.

The records show that the person's permission to reside expired on 8 February 2008. As the Deputy will be aware all non-EEA nationals are required to keep their permission to remain in the State up to date at all times and failure to do so may result in the individual being removed from the State.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

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

Immigration Status

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32047/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The International Protection Act 2015 was commenced on 31 December 2016. Under the Act, a new single application procedure was introduced under which all aspects of a person's claim (asylum, subsidiary protection and permission to remain) are considered together by the International Protection Office (IPO) rather than sequentially as heretofore. The IPO replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from the commencement date. The Chief International Protection Officer (CIPO) and the International Protection Officers in the IPO are independent by law in the exercise of their international protection functions. They are also bound by confidentiality provisions in respect of applicants, as set out in Section 26 of the 2015 Act.

If an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State, for confidential reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications and the applicant should contact the International Protection Office directly, either by email to info@ipo.gov.ie, by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to the Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2.

For your information, on 27 February 2017 the Chief International Protection Officer following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015. The IPO statement in relation to the prioritisation of applications is available on their website (www.ipo.gov.ie).

Travel Documents

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if travel documents will be approved to facilitate a visit to the UK for family reasons in the case of a person (details supplied) and their children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32048/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that if this person wishes to apply for a travel document they should, in the first instance, consult the web address below, from which information and the application form may be downloaded.

http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/application_for_a_travel_document

The application forms should be posted to:

Travel Documents Section

Ministerial Decisions Unit

Repatriation Division

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service

13/14 Burgh Quay

Dublin 2

Once the applications are received by the Travel Documents Unit of the INIS, they will be considered for eligibility. A separate application must be made for each individual in a family. As this is a busy season, applicants should allow a period of 10 to 12 weeks for their applications to be processed. To ensure fairness, applications are processed in chronological order.

Deportation Orders

145. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe he expects information submitted in the case of a person (details supplied) to be examined in the context of their appeal against deportation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32051/17]

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

An application for consent to make a subsequent application for International Protection under Section 22 of the International Protection Act 2015 was received by the International Protection Office and is currently being processed. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

Post Office Network

146. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when her new Department is operational, the remit she will have for the post office network and regarding the implementation of a report (details supplied). [31957/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Programme for a Partnership Government made a number of commitments in relation to the Post Office network which were assigned to my Department. The commitments in question have now been completed or are significantly advanced.

The report referred to by the Deputy was prepared on behalf of An Post and was presented to the company's management in December 2016. It is a matter for the Board and management of An Post to consider the implementation of the recommendations made in that report.

Overall responsibility for the postal sector, including the governance of An Post, falls under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. In light of developments in the sector since the Programme for a Partnership Government was agreed in 2016 - including the commissioning by An Post of a root and branch review of the company - it has been agreed that responsibility for all aspects of the postal services, including the Post Office network, should transfer to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. It will be a matter for that Minister's Department to oversee the future direction of An Post and the Post Office Network.

Údarás na Gaeltachta Funding

147. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the Exchequer funding given to Údarás na Gaeltachta by current and capital expenditure in each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [31958/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information sought by the Deputy is outlined in the following table:

Year	Capital €m	Current(Admin) €m	Current(Programmes) €m	Total €m
2010	11	3.915	18	32.915
2011	6.0	10.3	3.3	19.6
2012	5.938	9.871	3.273	19.082
2013	6.0	9.009	3.4	18.409
2014	5.687	8.798	3.0	17.485
2015	6.687	8.798	3.0	18.485
2016	9.087*	8.823	3.0	18.51
2017	6.687	8.958	3.250	18.895

* €2.4m in additional capital funding was secured for an tÚdarás in 2016 and is included in the figure provided.

Medical Card Applications

148. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application by persons (details supplied). [31828/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

HSE Data

149. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with disabilities awaiting respite beds in each HSE community health area in tabular form; the number

waiting six months, 12 months and more than 18 months; the comparable figures for June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31833/17]

150. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with disabilities awaiting respite beds in each HSE community health area in tabular form; the number waiting six months, 12 months and more than 18 months; the comparable figures for June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31834/17]

154. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of additional respite care beds that were added in 2016 and 2017, in view of the fact that the programme for Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for persons with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31838/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149, 150 and 154 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability. The Health Service Executive's (HSE's) Social Care Operational Plan for 2017 aims to provide 182,000 overnight stays in centre-based respite services, in addition to 41,000 day respite sessions. There are 210 new home support / in home respite supports for emergency cases and 185 new emergency residential placements in the 2017 HSE National Service Plan.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Data

151. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of older persons awaiting respite beds in each HSE community health area in tabular form; the number waiting six months, 12 months and more than 18 months; the comparable figures for June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31835/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy

152. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health further to an assessment and diagnosis by the Health Service Executive, the number of children currently awaiting the services of an occupational therapist; the number of these children waiting for more than six months, one year and two years, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31836/17]

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

reply.

Primary Care Centres Data

153. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres that have opened to date in 2017; the number due to open in the remainder of 2017; the number due to open in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31837/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 149.

Primary Care Centres Provision

155. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made in providing a primary care centre in Rowlagh, Clondalkin, Dublin 22; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31839/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Primary Care Centres Provision

156. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made in providing a primary care centre in Clondalkin village, Dublin 22; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31840/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Primary Care Centres Provision

157. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE waited over a year to return to the market to seek expressions of interest to develop a primary health care centre in Lucan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31841/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

158. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Health the reason cuts have been made for the provision of post-mastectomy products; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that

these cuts will effect every breast cancer survivor here (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31844/17]

163. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the roll-out of the new national HSE policy for the provision of post-mastectomy products and wigs in view of the short lead in time and the impact on patients and suppliers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31869/17]

165. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter raised in a newspaper (details supplied); if he will intervene and reverse the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31873/17]

191. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the circumstances whereby the HSE announced a change in policy relating to supports for persons affected by breast cancer; the policy going forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31953/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158, 163, 165 and 191 together.

I became aware through media reports on 30 June of the HSE's intention to introduce revised arrangements for the provision of supports to patients who are being or have been treated for cancer and other illnesses. I understand that the HSE's objective was to develop more equitable arrangements for the provision of post-mastectomy products, wigs and hairpieces and to extend these supports to a broader cohort of patients. Neither my Department nor I were involved or consulted in the course of this process. At my request, the HSE has deferred introduction of the proposed changes. I have asked the Executive to re-examine the matter with a view to devising a plan which will achieve an equitable outcome but not lessen the level of provision for patients who are already coping with serious illness. The HSE has confirmed that the *status quo* will operate pending further consideration of the matter, including discussions with my Department.

Hospital Appointments Status

159. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will advise on the details of the cross border directive for this person [31859/17]

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.

The Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursement to patients of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home member state and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level through the legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (Regulation 883/04).

The Health Service Executive (HSE) operates the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland. In line with practice in other EU member states, the HSE, through the National Contact Point (NCP) office, provides information for patients on the Cross-Border Directive on its website - <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/cbd/> - and also by phone. The principal function of the NCP is to facilitate exchange of information for patients concerning their rights and entitlements relating to receiving healthcare in another member state, in particular the terms and conditions for reimbursement of cost and the procedures for accessing and determining those entitlements.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a prosthesis for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31864/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the particular issue raised relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to you.

Mobility Allowance Review

161. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to restore the mobility aids grant (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31865/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I understand that the Deputy has confirmed that his question concerns the closure of the Mobility Allowance and the new Health (Transport Support) Bill.

The position is that, conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health and the *Programme for a Partnership Government* acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The next step is to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

Psychological Services

162. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide access to a child psychologist for a person (details supplied) in County Cork with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31866/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 158.

National Dementia Strategy Implementation

164. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a budget submission (details supplied) which calls for significant investments in community supports for persons living with dementia; if he will include these proposals as part of his Department's estimates for budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31872/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Irish National Dementia Strategy was launched in December 2014, with the objective of increasing awareness, ensuring early diagnosis and intervention and developing enhanced community based services.

In parallel with the Strategy, the Department of Health and the HSE have agreed a joint initiative with the Atlantic Philanthropies to implement significant elements of the Strategy over the period 2014-2017. This Implementation Programme represents a combined investment of €27.5m, with the Atlantic Philanthropies contributing €12m and the HSE €15.5m.

Key elements of the initiative include:

- the roll-out of a programme of Intensive Home Supports and Home Care Packages for people with dementia valued at €22.1 million over a three year period;

- the provision of additional dementia-specific resources for GPs, to include training materials and guidance on local services and contact points valued at €1.2 million;

- measures to raise public awareness, address stigma and promote the inclusion and involvement in society of those with dementia valued at €2.7 million.

The roll out of Intensive Home Care packages commenced in January 2015 and monitoring of the allocation and uptake of these packages to persons with dementia is ongoing. By May 2017, the HSE had delivered a total of 217 dementia-specific intensive homecare packages at an average cost of €953 per week. There are currently 122 people with dementia in receipt of an Intensive Home Care Package with a further 16 approved and 12 applications in progress. In addition to the Intensive Home Care Packages the HSE has continued to provide mainstream home help and routine Home Care packages to people with dementia whose needs have been

assessed as requiring these supports and within available resources. Up to 500 people with dementia and their families are expected to benefit from Intensive Home Care Packages over the lifetime of the implementation programme.

It is Government policy that, wherever possible and appropriate, people should be cared for in their own homes and communities, and the National Dementia Strategy specifically restates this commitment to those living with dementia.

The Department and the HSE are working on a mid-term review of the implementation of the National Dementia Strategy which will be published in the Autumn and will identify the achievements so far and set out the further work that is required to implement the Strategy over the next 12 months and beyond. The resources required for the ongoing implementation of the Strategy can only be considered in the context of the Estimates and Budget process. The mid-term review will assist in identifying further actions required and will be helpful in the context of budgetary considerations.

I have seen the the Alzheimer Society of Ireland pre-budget submission and have noted the contents. The proposals contained in the pre-buget submission will be considered as part of this process.

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 158.

Ambulance Service Provision

166. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if ambulances used by private ambulance providers must meet the same standards as those public ambulances run and operated by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31874/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In 2007, the EU published standards for ambulance vehicles. These standards focus on the construction of the vehicle as an ambulance, and minimum equipment requirements are outlined. All ambulances, regardless as to whether they are statutory or private, are required to meet this standard.

Ambulance Service Provision

167. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if ambulances used by private ambulance providers must have the same number of whole-time equivalents as those public ambulances run and operated by the State; if not, the number of whole time equivalents they operate with; the way in which this compares to a public ambulance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31875/17]

168. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if ambulances used by private ambulance providers are equipped to the same standard as those public ambulances run and operated by the State; if not, the number of whole-time equivalents they operate with; the way in which this compares to a public ambulance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31876/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 and 168 together.

The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) has published the Interfacility Patient Transport Standard which specifies the clinical level required to crew an ambulance relative

to the acuity of the patient. In that regard, ambulances must be crewed by a minimum of two persons, one whose primary role is to provide patient care, and the second whose role is combined with patient care and driving. The Standards also require that the necessary equipment and medications are available on the ambulance to enable the practitioner to manage patients within the scope of their practice.

PHECC standards are voluntary to all except the National Ambulance Service. However, to be approved by PHECC to implement clinical practice guidelines, there is a requirement on the ambulance provider to comply with the standards. It is understood that private health insurance companies, and the HSE, only avail of the services of PHECC approved private ambulance companies.

Ambulance Service Data

169. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times an on duty private ambulance has been involved in an accident while on duty in each of the years since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31877/17]

170. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times an on duty private ambulance has experienced mechanical difficulties while on duty, including ambulances that are on duty but cannot leave their starting location due to mechanical difficulties and had to be removed from duty as a result in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31878/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 169 and 170 together.

While the Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) has oversight of private ambulances from a clinical perspective, there is no requirement on private ambulance providers to report on operational incidents such as a mechanical failure. In these circumstances, I am not in a position to provide the information requested by the Deputy.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that as part of the annual approval process, private ambulance companies are required to report on adverse events within the previous 12 months. Any adverse incident involving the care of a patient must be included in this annual report to the PHECC.

Ambulance Service Data

171. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of complaints lodged by persons regarding private ambulances in each year since 2010; the way in which this compares with complaints lodged by persons regarding public ambulances in each year since 2010, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31879/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) received one complaint in respect of an approved ambulance provider in this time-frame. The complaint was examined and the company in question was issued with a safety notice to address immediate concerns, and to address other issues in the short to medium term. The company has since ceased trading and is no longer PHECC approved.

PHECC have received three complaints regarding statutory ambulance services. These complaints have been investigated and any issues arising have been addressed. However, as

some complaints regarding the National Ambulance Service may have been made directly to the HSE, I have asked the Executive to reply directly to you on this matter.

Ambulance Service Data

172. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of fatalities that have occurred to persons being transported by private ambulances; if there were questions regarding treatment and equipment in each year since 2010, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31880/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised by the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council, that as part of the annual approval process, private ambulance companies are required to report on adverse events within the previous 12 months. In that context, to date, no private ambulance company has reported a fatality.

Ambulance Service

173. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the body which assesses the safety and standards of private ambulances, the equipment and resources within same and the staff operating them; the frequency with which safety and standard checks are carried out; the way in which this compares to public ambulances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31881/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Ambulance vehicles are required, by law, to have an annual vehicle safety check, the Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test. This is a function of the Road Safety Authority.

Private ambulance companies, approved by the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC), are required to sign a statutory declaration annually, indicating that they have the necessary equipment and medications available for their practitioners. The statutory declaration also includes the requirement to maintain currency for PHECC registered practitioners. This requirement also applies to the National Ambulance Service.

I am advised that PHECC has carried out inspections on all approved private ambulance organisations; such inspections include an examination of the equipment and resources available. The Deputy may also wish to note that in order to provide an evidenced based inspection process, PHECC has developed the Governance Validation Framework (GVF) which is expected to be approved by Council shortly. The GVF will involve an annual self-assessment and a tri-annual site visit by PHECC for each organisation.

Hospitals Data

174. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age that are on waiting lists for surgery for hip dysplasia; the time they have been on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31882/17]

175. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of surgeries for hip dysplasia that have been carried out for children under 18 years of age in each year since 2010 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31883/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 174 and 175 together.

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

HSE Staff Recruitment

176. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the hiring of staff for the provision of a service (details supplied). [31884/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis and this work will be led by the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme. Indeed, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the Programme and, accordingly, it will develop clinical guidance regarding routine detailed scans. In the meantime, the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability.

One of the current challenges to increase access to anomaly scans is the recruitment of ultrasonographers who are skilled in using these machines. In this context, it is expected that the establishment of Maternity Networks across Hospital Groups will assist in developing a sustainable model that ensures that all women within each Hospital Group can access anomaly scans.

In relation to the specific query regarding Cavan General Hospital, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31902/17]

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 HSE is working with the Children's Hospital Group and Our lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin to ensure all children receive the treatment they require. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

178. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that cover the County Louth region. [31905/17]

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

Ambulance Service Data

179. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances based at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda. [31906/17]

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

Ambulance Service Data

180. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances based at Louth County Hospital. [31907/17]

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

Ambulance Service Data

181. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances that cover the Louth area outside of Our Lady of Lourdes hospital, Drogheda and Louth County Hospital; and the locations in which these ambulances are based. [31908/17]

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

Ambulance Service

182. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the age profile of each ambulance covering Louth county hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda and the wider County Louth region. [31909/17]

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

Ambulance Service Data

183. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the mileage on each ambulance that services County Louth; and the date on which each of these ambulances last underwent a full service. [31915/17]

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

Ambulance Service Data

184. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of private ambulances used by Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda annually ; and the cost associated with same. [31916/17]

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.

Ambulance Service Data

185. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of private ambulances used by Louth county hospital annually; and the cost associated with same. [31917/17]

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 Card Applications Data

186. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the processing times for medical card applications; his plans to allocate additional resources to the section in order to address the delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31929/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medical cards and GP visit cards are processed by the National Medical Card Unit (NMCU) in the HSE. I am aware that the processing times for medical cards increased in recent months. The HSE has informed my Department that this is primarily due to a reduction in the number of processing staff within the NMCU at present.

Processing times for applications/reviews can also be affected where supporting documentation required is not supplied or is incomplete. In such circumstances the HSE will correspond with applicants specifying the additional information required to progress the assessment of their application.

I have asked the HSE to respond directly on the measures being taken to address the current processing times.

The HSE provides weekly statistics on turnaround times on its website: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/schemes/mc>.

Accident and Emergency Departments

187. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his views on the report on the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise accident and emergency department; the timeframe for his response to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31931/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department and the HSE are committed to securing and developing the role of Portlaoise Hospital within the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Reports on Portlaoise Hospital in recent years point to the need for reconfiguration of some services to ensure that patients are treated in the most appropriate setting by specialist staff that can safely meet their needs. The HSE has submitted a draft Action Plan to my Department and it is currently being reviewed in detail.

The most important issue in relation to any changes at Portlaoise Hospital is that patient safety and good quality outcomes must come first. Any changes to services at Portlaoise, once

approved, will be undertaken in a planned and orderly manner to further improve services for patients at the hospital and will take account of existing patient flows and demands in other hospitals, as well as the need to develop particular services at Portlaoise in the context of the overall service configuration in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

188. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if progress has been made on recruiting staff at Dungarvan community hospital; and when beds that were recently closed due to staff shortages will be reopened. [31949/17]

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.

General Practitioner Contracts

189. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in progressing negotiations on a new general practitioners contract; and if he will undertake to expedite these. [31951/17]

190. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the manner and timeframe for giving effect to the programme for Government commitment to provide for salaried general practitioners; and if he will expedite this matter in view of the shortage of general practitioners. [31952/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 189 and 190 together.

The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The Programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

The aim is to develop a contract which has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions. A new contract should be flexible and be able to respond to the changing nature of the GP workforce. It should also include provisions in relation to service quality and standards, performance, accountability and transparency. I think this will be key in making general practice a more attractive career.

Since 2015, negotiations have resulted in a number of service developments including the provision of free GP care to under 6's and over 70's, the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of Care for adult GMS patients with Type 2 Diabetes and enhanced supports for rural GPs. The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract commenced in January of this year. Officials from my Department and the HSE meet with GP representatives on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues. The option of salaried GPs for areas where it has proven difficult to attract and retain GP services is one of the issues I expect will be considered in this context.

I understand that the discussions taking place are wide ranging and definitely ambitious in their scope. I think it's important to acknowledge that this will not be a straightforward pro-

cess. There will no doubt be challenges ahead for all parties involved. I would hope that everyone will remain focused on our common goal of putting suitable new arrangements in place that will work for patients, GPs, and other health care providers in primary care. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time. While I am of course anxious to see good progress made, it is not my intention to set a deadline for completion of discussions. I look forward to significant progress being made in the months ahead.

Question No. 191 answered with Question No. 158.

Prescriptions Charges

192. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the amount collected in prescription charges for medical card prescriptions in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and the projected amount to be collected in 2017. [31985/17]

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

Health Services Staff Remuneration

193. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of employees across the health sector earning €100,000 or more, €125,000 or more, €150,000 or more and €200,000 or more, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31986/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked that the HSE respond to you directly on the aspect of the question that relates to them. In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the aegis of the Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Services for People with Disabilities

194. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of personal assistant hours funded in each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017; the locations in which they were funded; the average number of hours provided by location; his plans to increase funding for additional hours; the reason there is no nationwide structure and no standard approach to allocating hours; the reason the number of hours varies from location to location; if this is being reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31987/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports to people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. The commitment is outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles, equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is committed to protecting the level of Personal As-

sistant services available to people with disabilities. In their National Service Plan for 2017, the HSE expects to deliver 1.4 million Personal Assistance hours to 2,357 adults with a physical and/or sensory disability.

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

Drug Treatment Programmes

195. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that sought drug treatment and rehabilitation services by county or local health area in each of the past five years and to date in 2017 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31990/17]

196. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that accessed drug treatment and rehabilitation services by county or local health area in each of the past five years and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31991/17]

197. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the budget for drug prevention, treatment and rehabilitation projects in each of the past five years; the projected budget for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31992/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 to 197, inclusive, together.

As these are a service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy

198. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by parents and children accessing services at a location (details supplied), in particular, accessing an occupational therapist or a speech therapist; the number of persons awaiting these services; the time they are waiting to access these services; and his plans to reduce and address this backlog that is impacting children and their families. [32019/17]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

199. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing difficulties being experienced by the family of a person (details supplied) that is attending a preschool; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the family have now been told that their home tuition grant will not be sanctioned due to the fact the person is turning six years of age and does not have a cognitive assessment report; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the same person is two and a half years awaiting this assessment and three and a half years awaiting speech therapy service; his plans to address this delay that

is impacting on this person who has autism and sensory process disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32021/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mobility Allowance Review

200. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the review into the system of motorised grants is complete; the outcomes of the review; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that users are struggling to replace vehicles; the timeframe for likely changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32023/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Conscious of the reports of the Ombudsman in 2011 and 2012 regarding the legal status of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant Scheme in the context of the Equal Status Acts, the Government decided to close both schemes in February 2013.

The Government is aware of the continuing needs of people with a disability who rely on individual payments that support choice and independence. In this regard, monthly payments of up to €208.50 have continued to be made by the Health Service Executive to 4,700 people who were in receipt of the Mobility Allowance.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health and the *Programme for a Partnership Government* acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme. I can confirm that work on the policy proposals for the new Scheme is at an advanced stage. The proposals seek to ensure that:

- There is a firm statutory basis to the Scheme's operation;
- There is transparency and equity in the eligibility criteria attaching to the Scheme;
- Resources are targeted at those with greatest needs; and
- The Scheme is capable of being costed and is affordable on its introduction and on an ongoing basis.

The next step is to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

Medical Card Applications

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will is-

sue and the timeframe for same in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32042/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Applications

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will issue and the timeframe for same in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32043/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Health Services Access

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which treatment and backup can be offered to persons (details supplied); if early access to required surgery and other therapeutic services can be arranged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32050/17]

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

Addiction Treatment Services

204. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds available in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in each local health office for persons with addiction issues for both under 18 years of age and over 18 years of age, in the areas of detox and residential addiction treatment; the locations of such beds available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32056/17]

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

Legislative Programme

205. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the Acts in force for which he has lead responsibility that have parts or sections yet to be formally commenced; the details or purpose of same, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32057/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Information is shown in the table below on Acts enacted over the last decade for which I have overall lead responsibility and that have sections or Parts yet to be commenced. The Deputy might let me know if he would like commencement information in regard to any specific earlier Act or in regard to any Act under the overall aegis of another Minister but which have Parts or sections for commencement by the Minister for Health.

Acts passed since 2007	Sections not in force	Timeline
Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Act 2017	Act passed in May 2017 and not in force.	It is envisaged that a commencement order will be made later this year.
Misuse of Drugs (Supervised Injecting Facilities) Act 2017	Act passed in May 2017 and not in force.	The HSE has established a working group to establish the first supervised injecting facility on a pilot basis in order to determine its utility, safety and cost-effectiveness in an Irish context. The Act will be commenced in parallel to the work to establish this pilot facility.
Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016	Sections 4, 5 and 7(a), (b) and (f)	Sections 4 and 5 facilitate the commencement of provisions of the Irish Medicines (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2006, transferring responsibility for the issuing of controlled drug licences from the Minister for Health to the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA). Discussions on the transfer of functions from the Department to the HPRA under these sections are on-going. Sections 7(a), (b) and (f) revoke certain statutory instruments which were confirmed under the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2015. These sections will be commenced when new regulations are made.

Acts passed since 2007	Sections not in force	Timeline
Health (General Practitioner Service) Act 2015	Section 2 - Amendment of section 58 of Health Act 1970.	Consultations are ongoing with the AGO. A decision will be made on commencement on the conclusion of the consultation process.
Health Identifiers Act 2014	Sections 7(2)-(6), 10(3), 11(1)-(5), (7), 12-20, 24, 35-39.	This is a comprehensive Act which is being commenced on a phased basis.
Health (General Practitioner Service) Act 2014	Sections 2, 3(a) and 9 - Amendments to Health Act 1970 and other issues.	Consultations are ongoing with the AGO. A decision will be made on commencement on the conclusion of the consultation process.
Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014	Sections 6(a)(iii), 12(b), insofar as it relates to the insertion of subsection (1B) of section 26 of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, sections 21 and 23.	Section 6(a)(iii), part of section 12(b) and section 21 relate to the proposed division of the profession of radiographer into the two professions of radiographer and radiation therapist. The commencement of section 6(a)(iii), part of section 12(b) and section 21 cannot take place until CORU has made various bye laws. Section 23 provides for conditions to be attached to the registration of a person with a relevant medical disability. The registration system is being updated to allow section 23 to be commenced. It is envisaged that commencement of these sections will take place during 2017.
Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014	Section 14.	This section relates to training. The matter is still under consideration.
Health (Alteration of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2013	Section 4 - Amendment of section 47 of Health Act 1970 (Appeals).	Consultations are ongoing with the AGO. A decision will be made on commencement on the conclusion of the consultation process.

Acts passed since 2007	Sections not in force	Timeline
Health (Amendment) Act 2013	Section 4.	This section provides that the HSE may outsource the operation and administration of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme. However there are no plans at present to change the existing arrangements in this regard.
Nurses and Midwives Act 2011	Sections 4(2), 9(2)(g)(ii), 37(2)(a), 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 59(1)(b) regarding professional competence, 59(2)(d), 65(1)(b), 84, 87 – 91, 102(2), (3) (5) and 103.	This is a comprehensive piece of legislation which is being commenced on a gradual basis. No date set for the commencement of the remaining sections.
Health Act 2007	Section 41(1)(a).	This relates to the boarding out arrangements for dependent adults in a private house. This provision is used to a very limited extent and the Health Service Executive makes arrangements to monitor the service. The section provides for the Chief Inspector of Social Services to inspect the performance of the HSE in this regard. There are no plans at present to extend this function to the Chief Inspector of Social Services.

Hospital Charges

206. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if private charges may only be implemented from the date on which the private patient waiver form is signed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32058/17]

207. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if all persons should be fully informed of the services they will receive in both the private or public system prior to signing the patient waiver form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32059/17]

208. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if all public hospitals are adhering to the terms of Consumer Protection Act 2007 when offering private services to consumers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32060/17]

209. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the person that sanctioned the issuance of correspondence threatening debt collectors to persons after demanding that patient waiver forms be signed after discharge from a hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32061/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 to 209,

inclusive, together.

The core purpose of the public hospital system is to provide services for public patients. Nonetheless, historically and currently a proportion of activity in public hospitals involves the provision of care to private patients and the income generated in this way is a key component of the funding of the public hospital system. Any curtailment of this funding stream would put further pressure on the Exchequer and the taxpayer in order to maintain service levels.

The Comptroller and Auditor General identified in his 2008 Report that for 50% of private patients no private inpatient charge applied, as they were accommodated in either a designated public bed or non-designated bed. The inability under the law to collect a private inpatient charge in such instances represented a significant loss of income to the public hospital system and to taxpayers and represented an indirect subsidy to private health insurance companies.

The Health (Amendment) Act 2013 was enacted to address the issue identified by the Comptroller and Auditor General and provided for the charging of all private patients in public hospitals, irrespective of the type of accommodation used.

When patients are admitted to hospital they always have the option of being treated as a public patient or opting to be treated as a private patient. Those patients opting to be treated privately have chosen to pay the consultant and the hospital in respect of the services that each provides. The charges applied in respect of private care in a public hospital relate not only to accommodation costs but also costs associated with non-consultant hospital doctors, nursing staff, medicines, blood, medical and surgical supplies, radiology, diagnostics, operating theatres, laboratories, administration and support staff.

The HSE levies the appropriate charge for private patients in public hospitals in accordance with the Health (Amendment) Act 2013. The private patient waiver form to which the Deputy refers has no legal standing in relation to the application of these charges.

The operational procedures for the management of patients' treatment preferences and the collection of private inpatient charges are a matter for the HSE in the first instance and I have asked the Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this regard. The application of these necessary procedures must be sensitive to the health status of patients whilst in hospital and I want to ensure that patients do not experience upset at such a difficult time. My Department is therefore working with the HSE to ensure that the processes in place across the hospital system for implementing the law in this regard are appropriate and that a consistent approach is taken in implementing them.

Farms Data

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review correspondence from an organisation (details supplied); his views on off-farm employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31827/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Off-farm employment opportunities are crucial to economic sustainability for many farm families. That has always been the case, and I am pleased that the economic recovery has generated additional employment opportunities in many rural areas. On almost half of all farms, either the holder and/or spouse has off-farm employment.

Teagasc released the preliminary results of the National Farm Survey 2016 recently, which showed average farm income of €24,000. However, there are significant differences in farm

income depending on the farming system and size of farm. It should be borne in mind that almost two-thirds (64%) of the farms represented by the National Farm Survey are classified as part-time based on labour input required. These farms had an average family farm income of €11,355. The remaining 36% of farms are classified as full-time, based on labour input required, with an average family farm income of €46,500.

Nitrates Action Programme Implementation

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the nitrates review campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31856/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) is designed to prevent pollution from agricultural sources and to protect and improve water quality.

EU Member States are required to review their NAP at least every four years. In 2017, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPCLG) which is the lead authority, assisted by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) embarked on the third review of Ireland's NAP with the European Commission, with a view to having the fourth NAP in place by 2018, to run from 2018 to 2021. The further objective is that, subject to approval of the fourth NAP, the agreement with the Commission of the renewal of Ireland's nitrates derogation for the period 2018 to 2021. The continuance of the derogation, which allows more intensive farmers to exceed the 170 kg/ha nitrogen from livestock limit, is considered vital to achieve targets set out under Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025.

As part of the NAP review a public consultation has taken place; 28 submissions were received including submissions from farmers and farming organisations. All the submissions have been reviewed and considered by the Expert Group, consisting of personnel from DHPCLG, Teagasc, EPA and my Department. These will form the basis for proposals to the Commission for a new Nitrates Action Programme; it is required that the proposals must have a scientific basis.

As regards nitrates penalties, the €100m Knowledge Transfer Scheme which has over 20,000 participating farmers includes a focus on environmental sustainability and in helping farmers pursue best practice, thereby reducing the risks of non-compliance and penalties. In addition my Department is regularly communicating with farmers including providing Nitrogen and Phosphorus statements to aid compliance with regulatory requirements and issuing text messages to those farmers who may be close to their nitrates limits.

Fishing Industry Data

212. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of lobsters, crabs and all other species of shellfish caught around the coast of Inishowen and also the coast of County Donegal in 2015 and 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31863/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Figures for fish landings in Ireland are retained by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA), Ireland's competent authority for Seafood Safety and Sea-Fisheries Protection.

I have asked the SFPA to send the requested landings figures directly to the Deputy.

Fishing Industry

213. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions he will take to protect fishing interests following the announcement by the British Government that it intends to leave the London Fisheries Convention of 1964; the process involved for withdrawal; and his views on the impact this will have on fishermen here and the wider industry, in view of the large percentage of landings made from the UK exclusive economic zone. [31932/17]

214. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to protect fishing interests at upcoming Brexit negotiations following the announcement by the British Government that it intends to leave the London Fisheries Convention 1964; and his views on the impact this will have on Brexit discussions and the Common Fisheries Policy. [31933/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 214 together.

The action by the UK in announcing its withdrawal from the 1964 London Fisheries Convention was not unexpected. The UK Government had been intimating this decision for some time now. It is nonetheless unwelcome and unhelpful as it suggests a signal of the UK intent to take a hard line on fisheries in the context of Brexit.

However, there are no immediate direct impacts for the Irish fishing industry from this action as it will not take effect for two years. Any longer term impacts will only become clear in the overall context of the Brexit negotiations. It is the message of intent and the potential implications of that intent in the wider 12 to 200 mile zone that causes concern for the negotiations to come.

The Convention deals primarily with the right of a number of countries to fish in each other's 6 to 12 mile fishing zones based on historic fishing activity. Most of these rights were later incorporated into the Common Fisheries Policy.

Under the Convention, the Irish fishing fleet has access to parts of the UK 6-12 mile zone while the UK fleet has similar access to parts of the Irish zone. The Irish fleet is not significantly dependant on this limited access. We do however catch significant quantities of fish in UK waters outside of the 12 mile zone.

As Michel Barnier noted earlier this week, the UK decision to withdraw from the London Fisheries Convention will not trigger any immediate change and he is focused on prioritising the fisheries interests of the EU 27.

This will not be a piecemeal negotiation with fisheries isolated from the wider negotiations on a post Brexit EU/UK relationship. There is a long way to go yet and nothing will be agreed until everything is agreed.

For this Government there are two clear objectives when it comes to fisheries and Brexit – the maintenance of our existing quota shares and our existing rights of access. This has, and will continue to be, my overriding priority.

To achieve these objectives, we must have unity of purpose across the Member States di-

rectly concerned and across the fishing industry. Disunity will only strengthen those in the UK that seek to exclude all EU fleets.

As the negotiations develop unilateral sectoral announcements, like this one, will be dealt with, as this will be, within the Brexit negotiation process and there will be no room, or indeed intent, to address issues in isolation.

I am working closely with our fishing industry and held a detailed public discussion with stakeholders just last week in Galway. I will remain in close contact with fisheries stakeholders as the issues develop and work with them and my fellow fisheries Ministers in the EU to ensure that we are all fully prepared for what are likely to be extremely complex negotiations.

I strongly believe that a unified front on these matters is best for Ireland, the EU and the continued sustainability of our stocks.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that I will be unequivocal in opposing any dilution of our existing EU quota shares, including protecting the benefit to Ireland of the Hague Preferences, and any limitations on our existing rights of access.

Rural Development Programme

215. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1680 of 20 June 2017, the criteria that apply under European regulations with respect to costs incurred and income foregone basis. [31934/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Article 33 of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 provides for measures under animal welfare. Article 33 (2) provides that any payments shall be granted annually and shall compensate farmers for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the welfare commitment made.

Where necessary, these costs may also cover transaction costs to the value of up to 20% of the premium paid for the animal welfare commitments.

In relation to costs eligible under animal welfare measures, only the cost of actions that go above and beyond any minimum regulatory requirements or normal husbandry practises may be deemed eligible. Any costs associated with practises carried out as part of normal husbandry practises are therefore not eligible.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

216. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the State's ranking compared with other EU countries regarding research carried out by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission regarding CO₂ per kilogram of milk and CO₂ per kg of beef produced here. [31935/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Report the Deputy is referring to is the European Commission's JRC Report, titled "Evaluation of the livestock sector's contribution to the EU greenhouse gas emissions (GGELS)".

The Report recognised that Ireland, with Austria, had the lowest cow milk emissions at 1 kg per kg of product, with the highest in Cyprus (2.8 kg) and Latvia (2.7 kg). The EU average was 1.4kg per kg.

Regarding beef, the Report found that Ireland's emissions per kg of beef were 18.4 kg per kg. The EU average was 22.2kg per kg.

The Report can be found at the following link:

https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/sites/agriculture/files/external-studies/2010/livestock-gas/full_text_en.pdf

Veterinary Inspection Service

217. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to the recently completed review of the veterinary laboratory services, his plans to ensure that all such facilities remain open; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31936/17]

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

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

This was the primary reason for tasking a Working Group led by Prof. Alan Reilly to undertake a comprehensive review of the Department's Laboratories. This review has considered both the central laboratory complex at Backweston and the eight regional laboratories located at Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo. The Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes recommendations on:

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

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

of the cost-benefit analysis.

Regional Development Funding

218. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase the Exchequer funding committed to each measure and sub-measure under the current regional development plan; and if there are regulatory impediments to this. [31937/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current Rural Development Programme is fully funded for its duration and I have no plans to increase the funding at this time. Our focus now is on full implementation of the existing schemes. Any changes to the Rural Development Programme's financial plan would be made by way of an amendment following consultation with the RDP Monitoring Committee. The procedure for amending the Rural Development Programme is set out in Article 11 of EU Regulation 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Rural Development Programme

219. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of EU member states that have both a suckler cow welfare scheme and an agri-environmental beef measure in operation under the regional development plan. [31938/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are 118 Rural Development Programmes across the EU for the 2014-2020 programme period implemented via 20 measures and 67 sub-measures. The breakdown of specific measures per Member State as sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, information on individual Rural Development Programmes are accessible on the European Commission's website (link supplied) and may be of interest to the Deputy.

https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files_en

Beef Industry

220. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in the sustainable beef assurance scheme, by county, in tabular form; and the costs the Exchequer incurs for this scheme annually. [31939/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Quality Assurance Schemes operated by Bord Bia have been developed over a period of years and extend beyond the farm gate as vertical industry integrated schemes. They are voluntary in nature. The Beef Quality Assurance Scheme commenced in 2004, and a Lamb Scheme commenced in 2007. A combined Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme commenced in January 2011. Both beef and lamb feature in the Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme launched in April 2017. An amount of €6 million has been provided in 2017 for independent on farm inspection and certification. The scheme is run by Bord Bia, and as this is an operational matter, should the Deputy require any further information, he should contact Bord Bia directly at the agreed Oireachtas contact address: info@bordbia.ie.

Dairy Sector

221. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the costs the Exchequer incurs for the sustainable dairy assurance scheme annually. [31940/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme, launched in December 2013, was developed in cooperation with milk producers, processors and the regulatory authorities, including my Department. The Scheme gives the dairy sector the capability to both benchmark Irish milk production internationally and to demonstrate the commitment of Irish dairy farms to sustainable farming practices. The Scheme also allows the sector access to markets and buyers that demand on-farm certification and provide assurance for those customers regarding sustainable production of quality milk.

The scheme is open to all milk producers with a valid herd registration who supply to milk processors in the Republic of Ireland. The scheme is run by Bord Bia, and as this is an operational matter, should the Deputy require any further information, he should contact Bord Bia directly at the agreed Oireachtas contact address: info@bordbia.ie.

Agriculture Scheme Data

222. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in the sustainable lamb assurance scheme, by county, in tabular form; and the costs the Exchequer incurs for this scheme annually. [31941/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Quality Assurance Schemes operated by Bord Bia have been developed over a period of years and extend beyond the farm gate as vertical industry integrated schemes. They are voluntary in nature. The Beef Quality Assurance Scheme commenced in 2004, and a Lamb Scheme commenced in 2007. A combined Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme commenced in January 2011. Both beef and lamb feature in the Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme launched in April 2017. An amount of €6 million has been provided in 2017 for independent on farm inspection and certification. The scheme is run by Bord Bia. I have asked Bord Bia to provide the Deputy with the information requested.

Agriculture Scheme Expenditure

223. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated additional cost that would accrue to the Exchequer on an annual basis if all animals irrespective of grade from a quality assured farm were eligible for a bonus under the beef and lamb assurance schemes. [31942/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The payment for cattle and sheep slaughtered in Ireland is a commercial matter between meat processors and farmers.

The operation of a quality assurance bonus including the eligibility criteria for such a bonus is also entirely a commercial matter between meat processors and farmers. The payments of bonuses to cattle and sheep under quality assurance schemes is not or never has been funded by the exchequer therefore there would be no additional cost accruing to the exchequer in the

scenario outlined by the deputy. Any additional payments would be a matter between meat processors and farmers.

Beef Quality Assurance Scheme

224. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1671 of 20 June 2017, the breakdown of the €6 million allocation for the beef quality assurance scheme. [31943/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The sum of €6m allocated in Vote 30 - Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Bord Bia Agency Statement) for the beef quality assurance scheme for 2017 is to cover the costs of independent on-farm inspections and associated Bord Bia Sustainable Beef and Lamb Assurance Scheme (SBLAS) certification. The scheme is run by Bord Bia.

GLAS Payments

225. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive their outstanding GLAS payment for 2016. [31944/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The 85% payment for 2016 has been processed and payment has issued to the person named.

Payment of the balancing 15% in respect of 2016 will commence shortly to all participants who pass the required pre-payment checks and who have submitted a nutrient management plan.

TAMS Payments

226. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when approval will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork regarding a specific scheme. [31950/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The approval letter to commence investments under the Young Farmer Capital investment Scheme of TAMS II issued to the applicant in this case on 4 July 2017.

Fishing Industry

227. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there will be clear and definite derogations for certain situations regarding mussel seed fishing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31955/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The situation the Deputy refers to relates to the judgment by the Supreme Court on 26 October 2016 in a case

taken by a number of mussel seed fishermen. In the judgment, the Supreme Court found that fishing by Northern Ireland boats within the 0 to 6 nautical mile zone of the territorial waters of the State is not permitted by law.

The background to this issue is arrangements which have long been in existence to provide access for fishing. The Voisinage Arrangements are long-standing reciprocal arrangements which allow fishing boats from Northern Ireland access to fish within the 0 to 6 nautical mile zone of the territorial waters of the State and *vice versa*.

It is important to note that the Supreme Court upheld the High Court finding that the Voisinage Arrangements are not invalid but that, as it stands, there is insufficient provision for them in domestic law. The Supreme Court in fact noted that the arrangements were a sensible recognition at official level of practice and tradition, where fishing boats traditionally fished neighbouring waters.

The application of the judgment is to all fishing by Northern Irish fishing vessels in the 0 to 6 nautical mile zone relying on the Voisinage Arrangements. Fishing activities that have a legal basis are not affected, such as those reliant on the access arrangements to Ireland's 6 to 12 nautical mile zone set out in Regulation (EU) No. 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The Government approved the publication of the Sea-Fisheries (Amendment) Bill to address issues raised by the Supreme Court judgment of 27 October 2016. If enacted and commenced, the Bill will give the Voisinage Arrangements a proper legal footing. The Bill was published in February 2017 and is available on the Oireachtas website. The Bill has been debated in the Seanad and now is at Committee Stage there.

While the Bill proposes to restore access to Northern Ireland boats to fish, under the terms of the Voisinage Arrangements, boats that make use of this access are subject to the same rules and conditions that apply to Irish sea-fishing boats. The Bill itself does not apply the specific conditions. Therefore, other parallel associated measures will be required to ensure that rules and conditions in place for Irish sea-fishing boats are appropriately applied to Northern Ireland boats fishing under the Voisinage Arrangements.

The process of identifying which conditions may need to be applied is under way. The conditions will include such restrictions as currently apply to Irish sea-fishing boats. When the necessary measures have been identified, the most appropriate mechanisms for applying them to Northern Ireland boats will be determined. The objective will be for these measures to come into effect at the same time as a commencement order for the Bill.

Together, the Bill and the associated measures will re-establish the status quo for fishing access that existed under the Voisinage Arrangements before the Supreme Court's judgment on 27 October 2016. The only difference will be that the Voisinage Arrangements will be provided for within a legislative framework.

Fishing Industry

228. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the fishery limits in place for Irish fishing boats with respect to nautical miles off the Irish coast, Northern Irish coast, the British coast and other member states coastlines under agreements (details supplied); the fishery limits applying to boats from other EU countries accessing Irish fishing waters; and the limits applying to Northern Irish fishing boats and British boats in accessing Irish waters as operating under these agreements in tabular form. [32009/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The London Fisheries Convention deals primarily with the right of a number of countries to fish in each other's 6 to 12 mile fishing zones based on historic fishing activity. Most of these rights were later incorporated into the Common Fisheries Policy.

The Convention allowed that each Coastal State could assert exclusive fishing rights within 6 nautical miles from its baselines (Article 2) but also provided for Voisinage or neighbourhood arrangements (Article 9).

One such arrangement allowed reciprocal access for vessels from North and South each other's 6 nautical mile limit. The Common Fisheries Policy (Article 5 of Regulation 1380/2013) provides for the continuation of such neighbourhood arrangements.

In light of the Supreme Court judgment, fishing by Northern Ireland vessels in Irish territorial waters is not currently provided for in domestic law. The application of the judgment is to all fishing by Northern Irish fishing vessels in the 0-6nm zone relying on the Voisinage Arrangements; fishing activities which have a legal basis (reliant on access arrangements to Ireland's 6-12nm zone in the EU Regulation 1380/2013) are not affected.

The Supreme Court upheld the High Court finding that the Voisinage arrangements are not invalid but that, as it stands, there is insufficient provision in domestic law for them.

Access for Vessels to the Irish 6 to 12 nautical mile zone

Country	Geographical Area	Species
France	Erris Head north-west Sybil Point west	Demersal Nephrops
Mizen Head south Stags south	Demersal Nephrops Mackerel	
Stags south Cork south	Demersal Nephrops Mackerel Herring	
Cork south, Carnsore Point south	All species	
Carnsore Point south, Haulbowline south-east	All species except shellfish	
United Kingdom	Mine Head south Hook Point	Demersal Herring Mackerel
Hook Point Carlingford Lough	Demersal Herring Mackerel Nephrops Scallops	
The Netherlands	Stags south Carnsore Point south	Herring Mackerel
Germany	Old Head of Kinsale south Carnsore Point south	Herring
Cork south Carnsore Point south	Mackerel	
Belgium	Cork south Carnsore Point south	Demersal
Wicklow Head east Carlingford Lough south-east	Demersal	

Access for Ireland to the UK 6-12nm zone	
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Geographical area	Species
Point Lynas north Mull of Galloway south	Demersal Nephrops
Mull of Oa west Barra Head west	Demersal Nephrops
Port Stewart South Cranfield Point North	All species
Jurby Head Chicken Rock	Herring
Point of Ayre Chicken Rock	Demersal Nephrops

Fishing Industry

229. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the exclusive economic zone in operation for EU fishing waters; the figures for each member state that has an exclusive economic zone for fishing; if he will provide each member state's fishing waters out of total EU fishing waters on a percentage basis; and the percentage of total EU fishing waters each member state would comprise if the UK were to leave the EU and the common fisheries policy at a future date, in tabular form. [32010/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The complete data sought by the Deputy is complex and will take some time to compile. My Department, in consultation with the Marine Institute, will provide a comprehensive reply directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Protected Disclosures

230. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the ESB has a formal protected disclosure policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32011/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I understand that ESB has a formal protected disclosures policy in place, in line with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014. In accordance with section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014, the ESB publishes a report each year in its Annual Report setting out the number of protected disclosures made to it during the preceding year and the action (if any) taken in response to those protected disclosures.

Waste Management Regulations

231. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the proposed new charging structures for waste management companies; the restrictions and limits he has placed on these companies' charging regimes; the steps he is taking to protect customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32016/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The amount of waste being sent to landfill has increased in the last two years. Last year, local authorities had to exercise emergency powers on two occasions to make additional landfill capacity available. We must act to encourage further waste reduction in order to avert a return to an over dependence on landfill. The introduction of an incentivised pricing structure for household waste collection will be an important measure in this regard.

Flat rate fees for household waste collection will be phased out over the period autumn 2017

to autumn 2018 as customers renew or enter new contracts. It is worth noting that the measure is not 'new' for the more than half of kerbside household waste customers who are already on an incentivised pricing plan, i.e., a plan which contains a per lift or weight based charge.

The charges offered by waste management companies are a matter between those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission's role includes the enforcement of competition and consumer protection law, the promotion of consumer and economic welfare, as well as investigating and challenging practices that are damaging to consumers and/or the wider economy and bringing anti-competitive behaviour and practices that are harmful to consumers to an end, where necessary by court actions.

In addition, I will put in place pricing monitoring arrangements to provide monthly reports on pricing developments and will ask the Competition & Consumer Protection Commission to report on the operation of the household waste collection market. This will inform the future development of national waste management policy before year end, which will provide an evidence base to establish a regulator to prevent price gouging. I have also indicated a support of €75 per person per annum for persons with long term or lifelong medical incontinence availing of a kerbside household waste collection service to meet the estimated disposal cost of incontinence products.

Waste Disposal

232. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he has taken to ensure diversity in the waste collection market; the basis on which it can be established that there are no restrictive practices in operation in view of the fact that all companies operating in the Irish market are registered off shore for tax purposes; his views on same; and his plans to require such companies to register here in order to ensure the consumer is protected. [32017/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The amount of waste being sent to landfill has increased in the last two years. Last year, local authorities had to exercise emergency powers on two occasions to make additional landfill capacity available. We must act to encourage further waste reduction in order to avert a return to an over dependence on landfill. The introduction of an incentivised pricing structure for household waste collection will be an important measure in this regard.

Waste collectors are free to compete with each other in an open and competitive market within the constraints of environmental, company, consumer protection and all other applicable legislation. The recent decision to phase out flat fees over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018 and provide flexibility to service providers to offer a suite of options facilitates the market participants continuing to compete and provide a number of service options for householders in terms of pricing plans.

Any requirements to publish financial accounts, including with respect to waste operators, is regulated under company law. I have no function in this matter. However, I understand that the Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 came into operation on 9 June 2017. As a result of this, companies described by the Deputy will be required to file financial statements with the Companies Registration Office in future. This new requirement will apply to financial statements for financial years beginning on or after 1 January 2017.

Transport Policy

233. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the departmental planning or strategy groups that are in place to consider, plan and address the impact that autonomous self-driving transportation vehicles will have on the law here; his policy approach to these developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31946/17]

234. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the forward planning, departmental or strategy groups in place to consider, plan and address the public policy impact that autonomous, self-driving transportation vehicles will have here; his policy approach to these developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31947/17]

250. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the departmental planning or strategy groups that are in place to consider, plan and address the impact that autonomous self-driving transportation vehicles will have on road design, traffic management and road traffic law; his policy approach to these developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31945/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 233, 234 and 250 together.

It is important to note at the outset that motor vehicles are not manufactured in Ireland.

At the EU level, there is a concerted effort to prepare for the introduction of fully automated motor vehicles. My Department is well aware of all the measures which the EU Commission, in conjunction with the automotive industry are working on. Fully automated vehicles are being tested in some EU Member States. However, at this stage all such prototypes have a driver on-board. To my knowledge, no fully automated vehicle is offered for sale in any EU Member State.

From an Irish perspective there is an Intelligent Transport Systems representative association, "ITS Ireland" which my Department was involved in setting up. It has been working in conjunction with my Department, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland to raise awareness in relevant industry sectors, through a connected and automated vehicles (CAV) Forum. This Forum met on 14 June last and a report is awaited of its deliberations. The Road Safety Authority is also keeping a watching brief on all developments and proposals in this area. My Department is also participating in a number of research projects in this area and is also working on an ITS strategy that will cover this area, amongst other things.

The EU wish to have fully autonomous motor vehicles circulating in the EU by 2019 is an ambitious target. It is incumbent on Ireland as it is on all Member States of the EU to ensure that the promise of safety attributed to fully automated driving materialises. All of the technology required for a fully autonomous motor vehicle will have to be fully tested. I am not aware of any proposals from the automotive sector to test such vehicles in Ireland.

Air Navigation Orders

235. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 216 of 29 June 2017, the nature of the consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in respect of issues on applications from civil airlines for exemptions to carry munitions through Irish airspace under the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973; and his views on whether such

consultation is in effect a rubber stamping exercise. [31829/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As outlined in my reply to question number 261 to the Deputy of 29 June, my Department seeks the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to foreign policy issues and the Department of Justice in relation to security issues. If the munitions involved are also classified as ‘dangerous goods’ the views of the Irish Aviation Authority are sought in relation to aviation safety issues. Applications are also sent to Department of Defence.

Up to and including 30 June 2017 of this year, I have refused 19 applications on the advice of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade highlighting the fact that the consultation process is not merely “a rubber stamping exercise”. Each application is considered with regard to foreign policy concerns by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and where it considers appropriate that Department will advise against the issuing of a permit.

National Transport Authority

236. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that the NTA is not going to review the likely usage of Kishogue station until the end of 2017 or early 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31842/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) given the Authority’s statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area.

I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Cycling Policy

237. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has discussed increasing the level of participation of women in cycling; if he has raised the need for women to be represented on the board of an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31897/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards. This includes the allocation of funding across its various programmes, including the Women in Sport programme. As sports participation is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred the first part of the Deputy’s Question to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

I would also like to inform the Deputy that I have recently written to all National Governing Bodies of Sport, including Cycling Ireland, on the issue of Leadership of Women in Sport. Addressing the participation of women at all levels in sport, including in positions of leadership, is an important element of the ongoing work on the new sports policy document, which I expect to finalise in the autumn.

Sports Organisations

238. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has discussed the level of representation of women on national boards with the various sporting organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31898/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): On 16 December 2016, I held a meeting with representatives of approximately 50 National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) in relation to the issue of Women in Sport Leadership, particularly the representation of women on their boards. There was a general consensus at this meeting that sports bodies should aim for increased gender balance on their boards, but that the introduction of mandatory gender quotas and punitive financial measures for non-compliance would not be feasible or appropriate.

Immediately prior to this meeting, Sport Ireland also wrote to all NGBs inviting submissions on the issue of Women in Sports Leadership. 47 submissions were received and these have been published on my Department's website. Overall, I consider that the meeting last December and the subsequent written engagement with the NGBs has generated a most useful debate in Irish sporting circles.

The issue of Women in Sports Leadership will be addressed in the upcoming National Sports Policy which I hope to publish in early autumn.

Road Projects Status

239. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will ensure that a renewed focus is placed on national road projects in County Donegal; if additional funding can be allocated to same to address infrastructure deficits in the county, in view of the unique challenges the county will face with Brexit; his views on whether an improved transport network post -Brexit will be beneficial for the county in attracting and growing business; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31918/17]

240. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a project (details supplied); and the total projected cost of the project. [31919/17]

241. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocation for a project (details supplied) from the NRA and or TII in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the planned purpose for each allocation; if funds have been fully drawn down; if unspent funds are ring-fenced for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31920/17]

246. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a project (details supplied); the projected cost of the project; the date on which he expects works to begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31925/17]

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated to a road project (details supplied) by the NRA and or TII in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the planned purpose of each allocation; if these allocations have been spent; if unspent funds will be ring-fenced for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31926/17]

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the allocations given to a project (details supplied) to date in 2017 and ensure that an increased allocation is given in order to begin works, in view of the increased traffic in the area and the significant tailbacks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31927/17]

249. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will meet with Dáil Éireann and local representatives in County Donegal regarding a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31928/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 to 241, inclusive, and Nos. 246 to 249, inclusive, together.

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

Investment priorities for the period to 2022 are set out in the Capital Plan published in September 2015. Decisions on the transport elements of the Capital Plan were framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority 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 under way. Within the overall funding envelope there is, therefore, limited funding for road upgrade projects and it was not possible to include a range of projects including the projects mentioned by the Deputy.

As regards the possibility of funding as part of the Capital Plan Review, my Department is making a strong case for additional funding, including the further development of a project pipeline for national road schemes. The final decisions on allocations are, however, matters for the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Government as a whole. As Minister I have to work within the budget available to my Department.

Notwithstanding funding constraints TII has been undertaking some preparatory planning work with Donegal County Council in relation to the TEN-T network in the County. While details of the national road allocations to local authorities for the years 2011-2017 (including to Donegal County Council) are available from the Dail library, actual expenditure is a matter for TII.

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.

I have received a request for a meeting relating to road infrastructure in Letterkenny and I am open to such a meeting subject to diary commitments.

Road Projects Status

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a road project (details supplied); the projected cost for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31921/17]

243. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated to a road project (details supplied) in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the planned purpose of each allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31922/17]

244. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if moneys allocated to a project (details supplied) in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in

2017 has been spent on the project; if money not used remains ring-fenced for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31923/17]

245. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated for a project (details supplied) by the Northern Ireland executive in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31924/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 242 to 245, inclusive, together.

The planning and implementation of the A5 project, including management of the project budget and expenditure, is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

The Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start - sets out the Government's commitment to contribute €75 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (New-buildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning procedures in the North have been concluded.

As regards the N2, the planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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.

Questions Nos. 246 to 249, inclusive, answered with Question No. 239.

Question No. 250 answered with Question No. 233.

Bus Éireann

251. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding that has been earmarked for the phased upgrading of bus stops on Bus Éireann routes to allow for full accessibility for mobility impaired users throughout the network; if a phased program is planned; the way in which it will be rolled out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32022/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of bus stops, bus shelters, bus stations etc in the State.

As the Deputy is aware, accessibility features are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage and new systems are fully accessible. In addition, 100% of the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann city fleets are wheelchair accessible, as well as approximately 80% of the Bus Éireann coach fleet.

With regard to existing infrastructure, there is an ongoing programme to upgrade public transport infrastructure and facilities to help improve transport accessibility across the country, including the installation of wheelchair accessible bus stops. The programme is managed by the NTA on behalf of my Department.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply in relation to the upgrading of bus stops on Bus Éireann

routes. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Taxi Data

252. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the geographic spread of accessible taxis; the targets that have been set in this regard for full national coverage; the optimum number of taxis; the way in which they are registered; the changes envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32029/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle industry, including issues pertaining to Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs), is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Child Care Services Data

253. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the estimated average hourly subsidy on the targeted child care scheme for those between six months and three years of age. [31854/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has a number of targeted schemes available to families where the eligibility would include children aged between six months and three years of age.

It is not possible to provide a meaningful hourly estimate given the wide range of eligibility and provision types. To give an indication, a family accessing Community Childcare Service (CCS) on a full-time basis for 25 hours per week on the highest available band would receive a subvention of €145 (the maximum amount available) which works out at €5.80 per week, if the same family accessed 20 hours this would result in an hourly rate of €4.00 per week.

Full details of all the permutations and eligibility requirements are available on the website www.affordablechildcare.ie. For the Deputy's information I have provided some of the key tables herewith

CCS Level of service	Band A (with medical card)	Band AJ (with medical card)	Band B	Band D
Full-day payment(5 hrs +)	€145	€80	€70	€50
Part-time payment(3:31 – 5:00)	€80	€80	€35	€25
Sessional payment(2:16 – 3:30)	€45	€45	€25	€17
Half-session payment(1:00 – 2:15)	€22.50	€22.50	€12.50	€8.50

I would also note that where a family have a child over six months and not yet eligible for the ECCE programme accessing Tusla registered childcare, they are eligible for universal payment of €20 for a full time place. Again for 25 hours this would work out at 80c per hour. The full table follows:

CCS Session Type	Weekly Subsidy
Full-time (i.e. 5 to 10 hours)	€20
Part-time (i.e. 3.5 to 5 hours)	€10
Sessional (i.e. 2.16 to 3.30 three hours thirty mins)	€7
Half-sessional (i.e. 1.15 to 2.15 two hours fifteen mins)	€3.50

Gender Equality

254. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of the upcoming review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015; the members of the review group; if she will guarantee members of the transgender community and non binary community will form part of that review group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31860/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Section 7 of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 provides for a review of the Act to commence within 2 years of enactment of the legislation.

Officials in my Department are currently making preparations for the review which is due to commence in September. While the terms of reference and the composition of the review group have yet to be finalised, I would like to assure you that the views of the transgender community and non-binary community will be essential in informing the review.

The findings and conclusions of the review must be presented to the Oireachtas by September 2018.

Social Welfare Code Reform

255. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Social Protection if progress has been made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities report; the cost associated with its full implementation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31871/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Make Work Pay interdepartmental group, published on 6 April this year, established under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities considered a range of approaches across relevant Departments to deliver on this commitment and made 24 recommendations under the broad headings of; reconfiguring the system of supports to ensure that work pays; promoting early intervention; communicating effectively that work pays and future proofing.

My Department, has already implemented a number of the report's recommendations including:

- people with a long-term disability payment who move off the payment to get a job will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years (the report recommended retention for 3 years);

- a fast-track return to Disability Allowance, or Invalidity Pension for people where employment does not work out;

- and development is underway on a new "Ready Reckoner", to calculate the net benefits and financial implications of working.

Other actions, such as strengthening the capacity of my Department's Intreo Service to support people with disabilities to get and maintain employment are ongoing and people with disabilities may, on a voluntary basis, make an appointment with a case officer to explore their options and develop a personal progression plan.

While the Government has decided to implement some of the recommendations others require further reflection or a period of consultation with disability groups and other stakeholders. My Department has already started this process of consultation with the disability sector on the recommendations related to extending the principle of "early intervention" to disability allowance and other disability payments.

Many of the recommended actions being progressed by Government Departments are at a consultative stage and Departments are not in a position to provide costings until specific proposals are in place.

I hope this answers the Deputy's question.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

256. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of extending social protection supports to the self-employed and permitting such persons to opt into the existing class A structure for jobseeker's benefit. [31963/17]

257. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending social protection supports to the self-employed and permitting such persons access to invalidity pension for three, six, nine and 12 months of a calendar year, respectively. [31964/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 256 and 257 together.

The Deputy may wish to note that the self-employed PRSI contributors will be eligible to qualify for the Invalidity Pension scheme with effect from December next. This is a major reform as self-employed people will now have access to the safety-net of State income supports, without having to go through a means test, if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability. Once such a contributor qualifies for the payment, it can be paid on an indefinite basis to pension age provided the relevant person continues to satisfy the medical and other criteria.

Consideration was not given to limiting eligibility for the payment to part of calendar years only.

While the measure is being implemented without any increase in the rate of contribution paid by self-employed workers in 2017, consideration will need to be given to the funding arrangements in later years. The estimated 2018 and 2019 costs are €23m and €38m, respectively, and these will rise further in later years.

In addition, Class S self-employed contributors have access since March last to the Treatment Benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental exams, and contributions towards the cost of hearing aids.

The last Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund was published in 2012 and did provide costings of extending two benefits - jobseeker's benefit and invalidity pension - to self-

employed workers on the same basis as it is paid to class A employees. It did not provide a cost for permitting self-employed workers to opt to into class A structure paying equivalent rates of contributions for cover for jobseeker's benefit.

It should be noted, in this regard, that there would not be a direct correlation between the cost of compulsory cover (and the rates of contributions required) for any given benefit or pension for all self-employed and with the costs of an opt in (or opt out) system. The third report of the Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare on Extending Social Insurance Coverage for the self-employed published in 2013 examined the extension of additional cover for the self-employed on a voluntary basis and concluded that "*extension on a voluntary basis, through either an "opt in" or "opt out" basis, could lead to the selection of bad risks and would undermine the social solidarity and contributory principles that underline the social insurance system* ." Accordingly, an opt in system would require those who opted in to pay at a higher rate of contribution than would apply under a compulsory system.

The Actuarial Review referred to above was completed in 2012. A new review is now well advanced and is expected to be published next month. This review will re-examine the projected PRSI contribution rates required to fund individual additional benefits, including invalidity pension and jobseeker's benefit to self-employed contributors. Given the improvements in the labour market and the economy generally over the period since 2012, the forthcoming review will provide a more up to date estimate of the costs of extending new benefits to the self-employed.

Social Welfare Benefits

258. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason jobseeker's allowance and rent supplement was cut from a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 leaving them without financial support for the past two months; the reason there was no response to medical correspondence and correspondence outlining part-time employment submitted to her Department on a number of occasions; and if she will reinstate both payments. [32024/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Notification was received from the Revenue Commissioners on 3 March indicating that the person concerned had commenced employment. As is normal in such cases the Department contacted the customer to establish the circumstances and correspondence commenced. Following receipt of the customer's correspondence on 12 and 21 March 2017 an official in the Department contacted them by phone on 30 March 2017 to outline the immediate steps the customer needed to take to secure their payment.

With regard to the customer's correspondence outlining part time employment an official in the Department advised the customer that they must, as is usual in such cases, return the relevant paperwork for the Department to verify the nature and extent of the declared employment.

With regard to the customer's correspondence outlining her medical situation the Deputy will appreciate that one of the conditions for a person to receive a job seeker payment is that they are capable of full time employment. Where a customer cannot work as a result of an illness they should contact the office who will assist them with applying for a more appropriate payment.

The customer was also advised on 30 March 2017 that there was a job interview scheduled for 6 April 2017, in an area in which they held a qualification in and had expressed an interest in working in, and that non-attendance would affect her payment. The customer did not attend

the interview on 6 April and after a number of weeks of no further contact the customer's claim was deemed to be closed. This initiated a review of the customer's rent supplement claim.

If the customer wishes to continue with their claim they will need to provide the previously requested details regarding their declared casual employment. The relevant official will contact the customer to discuss the customer's claim and again advise of the steps required. The customer's rent supplement claim will be reassessed at that point.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

259. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if medical evidence submitted under separate cover can be taken into account in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32033/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): This lady submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 12 May 2016.

The application, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person in question was notified in writing of this decision on 27 July 2016 and of her rights of review and appeal.

The person in question appealed to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) a decision by a deciding officer to disallow her application for disability allowance.

Following due consideration, the appeal of the person in question was disallowed by an appeals officer (AO) on 14 December 2016. She was notified of this decision in writing by the SWAO on the same date.

An AO's decision is final and conclusive in absence of any fresh facts or evidence.

It is open to the person in question to reapply for DA.

Rent Supplement Scheme Appeals

260. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will review an application for rent support in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32039/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Rent Supplement claim for the person concerned was disallowed as she failed to provide

documentation that would allow an accurate assessment of her entitlement.

The person concerned has appealed this decision and her case has been referred to the Appeals Office accordingly. An Appeals Officer will make a decision on the case based on the documentary evidence presented and/or arising from an oral hearing.

The appeals process functions independently of the Department and will need to be completed before any further action can be considered.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility

261. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which a person (details supplied) has remaining contributions to facilitate entitlement to jobseeker's benefit; her views on whether the legislation in place accurately designates a plot of land such as a farm; if in such a case the person is assessed with means derived from the capital or the rental value of such a plot; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32041/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned does satisfy the contribution requirements to qualify for jobseeker's benefit, albeit at a reduced rate with reference to level of remuneration they received in their last employment. Taking this into account the department has sought to ascertain, given the person's circumstances, which payment would be more advantageous to the customer to receive, jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's benefit or farm assist.

To this end the person concerned met with a Social Welfare Inspector two weeks ago and was asked to return outstanding information in order to establish eligibility with regard to availability and means. This information was supplied to the Inspector earlier this week and they are now in a position to complete their report and submit it to the Deciding Officer.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

262. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if arrangements can be made to ensure a basic social welfare payment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32044/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseekers allowance application of the person concerned was disallowed due to the failure to disclose information regarding means to the department and not due to her homelessness. Their homelessness is as a result of the enforcement of an Order for Ejectment by the Sheriff's Office of the local District Court due to significant rent arrears being owed to their landlord by the person concerned. The person concerned should contact their local authority to request assistance in addressing their current housing situation.

An appeal of the decision to disallow jobseekers allowance has been submitted to the independent Appeals Office.

An application for assistance under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme has also been received by the department and is being considered by the designated person.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payments

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an exceptional needs payment to address rent arrears can be issued in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32045/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has been requested to submit to the Department documentation confirming any change in her circum-

stances and details of her current weekly income in order to determine her ongoing eligibility to Rent Supplement.

On receipt of this documentation her entitlement to Rent Supplement, to include any arrears due, can be assessed accordingly.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if an entitlement to jobseeker's allowance or alternative payment can be made in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32046/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned has not, as of yet, made an application for payment to the department, and therefore it is not possible to determine their entitlement to jobseekers allowance or any alternative payment. If they wish to make an application for payment they must submit the completed relevant application forms to the department to enable a determination of their eligibility to be made.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme Data

265. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funding allocated to the social inclusion and community activation programme in each year since being established, in tabular form; the allocation in 2017; the actual amount of expenditure expended in each such year and to date in 2017; and the expenditure incurred under this scheme, by county, in each year and to date in 2017. [31959/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) was rolled out across communities on 1 April 2015 and will run until 31 December 2017, with funding allocated as follows.

2015 (9 Months)	2016	2017
€28 million	€37.5 million	€37.5 million

SICAP operated for a 9 month period for 2015 and the funding allocation included an allocation of €2 million under the European Structural Funds (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020 and €2 million under the Youth Employment Initiative. The SICAP funding allocation for 2016 and 2017 includes an allocation of €3 million for each year under the ESF.

SICAP aims to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.

The table below sets out the requested information regarding expenditure incurred, by county, in 2015 and 2016. Verified data on expenditure to date in 2017, by county, is not available. However, it is generally the case that the bulk of expenditure takes place in the latter half of the

year. Please note that SICAP did not commence in Galway County until January 2017 due to a deliberative process. The figures in the following table for Galway in 2015 and 2016 refer to Galway City only:

County	Annual Budget 2015	Spend 2015	Annual Budget 2016	Spend 2016	Annual Budget 2017
Carlow	402,321	399,820	536,428	536,424	536,428
Cavan	556,338	535,041	741,784	732,057	741,784
Clare	641,506	583,828	855,341	855,341	855,341
Cork	2,309,073	2,297,413	3,078,956	3,077,547	3,078,956
Donegal	1,480,935	1,426,506	1,974,580	1,970,067	1,974,580
Dublin	7,149,314	6,813,594	9,532,555	9,509,363	9,532,555
Galway	487,093	487,062	649,458	649,456	2,251,039
Kerry	1,222,199	1,218,688	1,629,598	1,628,740	1,629,598
Kildare	765,170	765,170	1,020,227	1,011,063	1,020,227
Kilkenny	455,860	453,445	607,813	607,453	607,813
Laois	423,048	418,188	564,064	554,501	564,064
Leitrim	393,488	350,446	524,650	516,759	524,650
Limerick	1,639,070	1,632,216	2,185,427	2,184,407	2,185,427
Longford	383,669	364,255	511,559	506,590	511,559
Louth	965,881	942,742	1,287,841	1,287,708	1,287,841
Mayo	930,908	905,177	1,241,211	1,231,150	1,241,211
Meath	235,799	234,470	371,072	367,624	371,072
Monaghan	464,453	457,608	619,271	614,852	619,271
Offaly	553,736	541,373	738,314	731,383	738,314
Roscommon	448,762	442,318	598,350	595,357	598,350
Sligo	439,136	408,552	585,514	585,502	585,514
Tipperary	841,838	835,573	1,122,450	1,105,851	1,122,450
Waterford	823,835	813,254	1,098,446	1,095,322	1,098,446
Westmeath	574,661	559,975	766,215	755,392	766,215
Wexford	1,276,311	1,272,246	1,701,748	1,698,940	1,701,748
Wicklow	972,584	921,279	1,296,777	1,288,405	1,296,777

Communities Facilities Scheme

266. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funding allocated to the communities facilities scheme in 2017; the expenditure incurred to date in 2017; and the expenditure incurred under this scheme by county in tabular form. [31960/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's Communities Facilities Scheme, which launched on 10 March, has a total allocation of €2 million for 2017. The Scheme is being administered on behalf of the Department by Local Community Development Committees under the remit of the Local Authorities. Each of the 31 Local Authorities will be provided with an equal allocation of €64,500 and arrangements are currently being made for the transfer of these funds to the local authorities.

Further information on the Scheme can be found on the Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/community/local-and-community-development/communities-facilities-scheme.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

267. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of houses that have been bought by the Dublin local authorities in other counties in 2016 and 2017; the locations of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31978/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While the acquisition of new and previously-owned houses and apartments through my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme has been a strong feature of social housing delivery, local authorities in Dublin or elsewhere do not acquire properties in other counties.

Statistics for acquisitions completed in 2016 are being finalised, but it is estimated that almost 2,000 houses and apartments were purchased for social housing use last year, involving all the local authorities and also Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). Further significant acquisitions will be made this year, including through the allocation of €70m for the Housing Agency to establish a revolving fund to acquire some 1,600 units over the period to 2020 for social housing use. The fund will be replenished by the Agency through the sale of units primarily to the AHB sector.

Housing Adaptation Grant

268. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans for a review of the housing adaptation grant; if consideration has been given to changing the financial criteria in respect of the income for all persons; if so, the proposed changes; his views on whether the €30,000 limit is regarded as adequate, in view of construction inflation; if not, if new limits are envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32052/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I have no plans to further review the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, given that the terms and conditions governing the grants, including the income limits, were revised in 2014. My main focus currently in respect of these grants is in seeking to spread their benefits by further increasing the funding, as has been done for 2017, with a 6% increase bringing an overall funding availability of €59.8m nationally. Some 8,000 households benefitted under this Scheme in 2016, and with this additional funding, an increased number of households should benefit in 2017.

There are no current plans to increase the upper limit of the grant from €30,000. The average individual amount paid under this grant is already lower than the €30,000 upper limit and the current arrangement, therefore, serves to spread the benefits of the available funding to a higher number of recipients.