

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].

Commencement of Legislation

1. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to commence the sections of the Companies (Accounting) Act pertaining to filing requirements for unlimited companies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36828/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 (Commencement) Order 2017 (S.I. 246 of 2017) and the Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 (Commencement) (No. 2) Order 2017 (S.I. 250 of 2017) together commenced all sections, except for section 80, of the Companies (Accounting) Act 2017. The commencement date was 9 June 2017.

The Commencement Orders provide that the Act applies to financial statements in respect of financial years that began on or after 1 January 2017.

As subsection (2) of section 78 of the Companies (Accounting) Act 2017 specifically provides that the amended section 1274(2)(a)(iii) of the Companies Act 2014 shall come into operation on 1 January 2022, unlimited companies (ULCs) that are holding companies of limited undertakings will not have to comply with section 1274(2)(a)(iii) until that date. All other provisions in section 78 concerning the financial reporting obligations of unlimited companies are in operation since 9 June 2017 and, under the Commencement Orders, apply to financial statements in respect of financial years that began on or after 1 January 2017.

Section 80 amends the definitions of “EEA company” and “non-EEA company” in section 1300 of the Companies Act 2014. These are types of external companies. As a result, some unlimited companies that are incorporated outside of Ireland and that have a branch in Ireland will become subject to the obligations that the Companies Act 2014 imposes on external companies, as soon as section 80 comes into effect.

One such obligation is to register the external company in the Companies Registration Office within 30 days of establishing a branch in Ireland. Part of that registration includes the delivery of the most recent accounting documents to the Registrar of Companies. Therefore, any company that becomes an external company as a result of the amended definition in section 80, will be obliged to register and file financial statements within 30 days of the establishment of a branch in Ireland. Had section 80 been commenced with immediate effect, this 30 day deadline could have required such companies to file accounting documents in respect of financial years that began before 1 January 2017, which would be earlier than for the other types of company that face new reporting financial reporting obligations under the Companies (Accounting) Act

2017.

A draft Commencement Order for section 80 is with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for settling. I intend to make that Order shortly, with a commencement date that will meet the objective of ensuring that companies being brought within the scope of section 1300 of the Companies Act 2014 do not have to file financial statements and related reports with the Companies Registration Office for financial years earlier than those for which companies being brought within the scope of section 1274 of that Act, other than those being brought within that scope by virtue of section 1274(2)(a)(iii), have to file such documents.

Legislative Measures

2. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to introduce legislation to regulate the use of au pairs in order to facilitate genuine cultural exchanges while ensuring that au pairing cannot be used by unscrupulous employers to avoid adhering to their legal obligations to their employees. [37105/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Following the coming into effect of the Labour Affairs and Labour Law (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 on 1st September last, responsibility for employment rights policy and legislation transferred to my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

There is no separate legal definition of the term “au pair” in Irish legislation, and individuals described as “au pairs”, “nannies” or “child-minders” are not exempted or treated as separate categories of workers under Irish employment law. Ireland’s body of employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on an employer-employee basis, regardless of what title is given to them. Therefore, once it is clear that a person is working under a contract of employment (written or verbal), on a full-time or part-time basis, that person has the same protection under employment law as other employees, including entitlement to the national minimum wage.

All employers, including those in private homes, carry the same obligations in relation to compliance with employment law. Where the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which is mandated to secure compliance with employment legislation, receives a complaint involving somebody described as an “au pair”, the WRC will investigate with a view to establishing whether a person has statutory entitlements under employment law. Complaints involving au pairs are considered on a case-by-case basis, in the light of the facts of each case.

The WRC’s Customer Service Section provides information to both employers and employees in relation to employment rights and obligations. The WRC’s Customer Service Section can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or 059 9178990. The website www.workplacerelations.ie also provides information on employment rights.

Work Permits Appeals

3. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of an appeal for a work permit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37112/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances

Fitzgerald): The Employment Permits Section informs me that the Reviewing Officer is currently examining this review and has requested additional information from the applicant. On receipt of this further information a decision will be made on this review.

Military Exports

4. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the licensed arms manufacturers in the State; the companies that operate licences for producing military equipment, including dual use goods that are resold to the military and civil sectors; and the type of equipment these companies produce for domestic use and for export. [37490/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department is responsible for controls on the export of military items from Ireland. Under Irish law, military export licences must be sought in respect of the export from Ireland of military goods and technology, and any components thereof, listed in the Annex to the Control of Exports (Goods and Technology) Order, S.I. No. 216 of 2012 which reflects the EU Common Military List.

My Department is also responsible for licensing the export of dual-use items outside the EU pursuant to Council Regulation (EC) No. 428/2009 setting up a Community regime for the control of exports, transfer, brokering and transit of dual-use items.

There were 128 licences with a value of €63m issued in 2016, to export goods which have a military classification. These licences were in respect of:

- components which have a military rating
- firearms for hunting, sporting and recreational activities, and personal use
- explosives for commercial mining and quarrying.

There were 409 individual licences with a value of €394m issued in 2016 to export dual-use goods. There were further exports of dual use goods with a value of €2.8 billion under 21 global licences. Global licences are issued to exporters where they have large volumes of low risk products. These licences are issued subject to a number of strict conditions.

Due to commercial sensitivities, I am not in a position to provide the names of companies that have obtained export licences.

EU Directives

5. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the consultation process in place and the timeframe for implementation of the EU (Disclosure of non financial and diversity Information by certain large undertakings and groups) Regulations 2017; if the Government has draft proposals in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37703/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The European Union (Disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups) Regulations 2017 (S.I. no. 360 of 2017) were signed into law on 30 July 2017. These Regulations transpose into national legislation Directive 2014/95/

EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups. The Regulations came into operation on 21 August 2017 and apply to financial years beginning on or after 1 August 2017.

My Department conducted a public consultation on the transposition of Directive 2014/95/EU in April 2015. The submissions received on foot of that consultation are published on the Department's website.

Brexit Issues

6. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the call by organisations (details supplied) for the establishment of a Brexit adjustment fund for businesses adversely affected by the United Kingdom leaving the customs union; the measures her Department proposes to meet this demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38032/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require including that to which the Deputy refers, to address challenges arising as a result of the Brexit Referendum, which is likely to represent a structural shift in the UK trading relations. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

On foot of extensive engagement with industry, my Department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses. This work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

A lot can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. We are confident that the measures currently in development will be State Aid compliant, and we are taking steps to ensure that we can use all options available under the State aid framework to provide support to companies impacted by Brexit.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance this with the EU Commission.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Funding

7. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual Exchequer funding provided to the ODCE in each of the past ten years and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38444/17]

58. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual budget for the Office of Corporate Enforcement in each of the years 2008 to 2017, inclusive, in tabular form. [38526/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 7 and 58 together.

The Pay and Non-Pay allocation and actual expenditure by the Office of the Director of

Corporate Enforcement for the years 2007 to the end of August 2017 is set out in the following table.

-	Pay allocation	Pay expenditure at year end	Non-Pay allocation	Non-Pay expenditure at year end
2007	€2.119m	€2.140m	€2.704m	€2.215m
2008	€2.681m	€2.412m	€2.276m	€1.912m
2009	€2.655m	€2.664m	€2.880m	€2.941m
2010	€2.579m	€2.625m	€3.507m	€1.074m
2011	€2.660m	€2.629m	€3.307m	€0.768m
2012	€2.620m	€2.463m	€3.077m	€0.973m
2013	€2.475m	€2.394m	€2.855m	€0.729m
2014	€2.465m	€2.216m	€2.207m	€0.797m
2015	€2.884m	€2.156m	€2.207m	€0.917m
2016	€2.808m	€2.006m	€2.207m	€0.721m
2017 (to end August 2017)	€2.838m	€1.361m	€2.057m	€0.483m

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

Departmental Schemes

8. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the review of the Succeed in Ireland initiative (details supplied); if the terms of reference of the review have been finalised; if the independent reviewer has been appointed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36810/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As was announced previously, my Department will be commissioning an independent review of the Succeed-in-Ireland programme. That review, which will be carried out after details of the initiative's full and final costs are available, will equip us with a thorough understanding of the programme's results and its contribution to employment generation in the State.

The terms of reference for the review will be finalised in due course.

Brexit Negotiations

9. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of each specific EU Competitiveness Council Ministers' meeting at which she made the case for the need for a revision of state aid rules of regulation (EU) No. 1407/2013 to protect enterprises and related jobs here during the UK's two-year exit phase from the EU and the subsequent transition phase; the date of each such meeting at which this was raised, in tabular form; the status of progress being made at EU level to increase state aid thresholds to support enterprises here in the event of a hard Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36842/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances

Fitzgerald): Since the Brexit Referendum, my predecessor, Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor, attended three meetings of the Competitiveness Council on 29th September 2016, 28th November 2016 and 20th February 2017. State Aid rules did not feature on the agenda. However, in our engagements with both EU Commissioners and Ministers from other Member States since the UK decision, Brexit has been a central part of the discussions at these meetings. Last autumn, officials of my Department initiated discussions with DG Competition to sensitise the Commission to potential difficulties likely to be encountered by Irish firms from the Brexit referendum result. I also informed Michael Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, of these discussions when I met him in Brussels on 10th July 2017. These discussions continue at the highest levels to address all relevant issues relating to any proposals emerging from our work with industry.

The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require to address challenges arising as a result of the Brexit Referendum, which is likely to represent a structural shift in the UK trading relations. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

On foot of extensive engagement with industry, my Department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses. This work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

A lot that can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. We are confident that the measures currently in development will be State Aid compliant, and we are taking steps to ensure that we can use all options available under the State aid framework to provide support to companies impacted by Brexit.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance this with the EU Commission.

Employment Data

10. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of cases of bogus self-employment dealt with by WRC labour inspectors annually in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [36845/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Ireland has a well-resourced and proactive labour inspectorate, which forms part of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). Inspections are undertaken on the basis of risk analysis and as a result of complaints received.

Where the WRC inspection service receives complaints in relation to bogus self-employment or bogus sub-contracting they are forwarded to the Department of Social Protection (Scope Section) and/or to the Revenue Commissioners for investigation either solely by those bodies or jointly with the WRC. Investigation of the employment status and the PRSI insurability of individuals is a matter for the Department of Social Protection. Complaints regarding the abuse of the sub-contracting or the Relevant Contracts Tax (RCT) system are solely a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. Thus, the WRC does not keep statistics in relation to complaints of bogus self-employment.

In most cases it will be clear whether an individual is employed or self-employed. Where

there is doubt in relation to the employment status of an individual the relevant Departments and Agencies will have regard to the Code of Practice for Determining Employment or Self-Employment Status of Individuals. This Code was drawn up and agreed in 2007 by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Irish Business and Employers Federation.

The WRC has statutory authority to share information with both the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection. Such information sharing takes place regularly between WRC inspectors and their counterparts in these bodies. In cases of mutual interest, joint operations and/or inspections may be carried out. This exchange and sharing of information, together with the joint operations, is a valuable element of the inspection process and contributes to uncovering non-compliance in the areas covered by the relevant bodies.

The WRC provides information on employment, equality & industrial relations legislation, through the Workplace Relations Customer Service and Information Unit. It can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or via its website www.workplacelrelations.ie.

Personal Insolvency Arrangements

11. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeframe to implement the recommendations for increasing transparency and oversight in the way in which employees and creditors are dealt with in insolvency; her views on each finding of the company law review group report on the protection of employees and unsecured creditors (details supplied); and her further views on whether legislative changes are needed. [36848/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Company Law Review Group (CLRG) was asked to examine and recommend ways in which company law could be amended to ensure better safeguards for a company's employees and unsecured creditors. In response to this request, a root and branch review was carried out of all relevant provisions of the Companies Act 2014 and, in particular, whether new provisions should be proposed. The CLRG Report on the Protections of Employees and Unsecured Creditors was published on 13 July 2017. Proposals for legislative change are suggested in the Report which, while not representing a panacea, could potentially address some of the difficulties experienced by employees and unsecured creditors in situations of company insolvency, while improving transparency and accountability.

The recommendation in the Report relating to the proposed Self-Administered Liquidation has been referred for further consideration and elaboration to a subcommittee of the CLRG on Corporate Insolvency, which is currently reviewing the provisions in relation to winding up in the Companies Act 2014 as part of the CLRG Work Programme for 2016-2018. The remaining recommendations are also under consideration by officials in my Department. It is intended that any proposals for legislative change arising from these recommendations will be forthcoming as soon as is practicable. Finally, I understand that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has convened an interdepartmental working party to examine how employees' access to the Social Insurance Fund could be improved in circumstances where their employer has not entered formal insolvency. The work of this group is progressing.

Enterprise Ireland Funding

12. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of funding Enterprise Ireland has provided from the high-potential start-up funding scheme in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of companies which have received funding from this specific scheme; the cumulative number of jobs that have been created after this form of funding was provided to these companies; the cumulative amount of additional exports in euro that have been generated by these companies after they received this form of funding for the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36849/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In January 2017, Enterprise Ireland, an agency of my Department, published its strategy for the period 2017-2020. The strategy was developed in the context of Brexit and focuses on supporting clients to both Build Scale and Expand Reach. Despite economic and market uncertainties, Enterprise Ireland's strategic targets are to:

- Assist clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 and to sustain the existing record level of jobs.

- Grow annual exports by €5bn to €26bn per annum.

- Increase the level of spend in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020.

Enterprise Ireland works to increase the number of companies starting up, succeeding, expanding, exporting and ultimately creating jobs in Ireland. Of the total 629 start-ups supported by Enterprise Ireland across the period 2014-2016, over half - 52% - were located outside Dublin.

Enterprise Ireland's start-up activity is focused on supporting High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs). Encouraging the establishment and supporting the development of innovation-led HPSUs with a strong export focus is a key priority for Enterprise Ireland and is fundamental to building the next generation of world class Irish companies. HPSU companies are defined as start-up ventures that are:

- Introducing a new or innovative product or service to international markets.

- Involved in manufacturing or internationally traded services.

- Capable of creating 10 jobs in Ireland and realising €1 million in sales within three to four years of starting up.

- Led by an experienced management team.

- Headquartered and controlled in Ireland.

- Less than six years old.

Enterprise Ireland's HPSU Fund supports the start-up and development costs of HPSU companies through an equity investment that is provided on a co-funded basis. This investment goes towards the achievement of an overall business plan, rather than funding towards discrete elements of a business plan, such as R&D or employment creation. The funding of a business plan in this way is similar to a venture capital (VC) approach. The HPSUs that Enterprise Ireland works with are developing and commercialising new or substantially improved technologies, products, processes or service offerings when compared to state-of-the-art in industry players in the European and global marketplace.

The table below presents the number of companies in the HPSU Class 2015, 2016 and to

date in 2017. Data on the jobs created, exports and total payment to each cohort by Enterprise Ireland is also presented.

Year Achieved	No of HPSUs approved	Jobs Created Permanent Full Time	Jobs Created Other	Additional Exports €	Total Payments from year approved as HPSU to 04/09/17 €
2015	105	486	136	14,769,000	19,002,640
2016	101	154	25	7,337,000	16,489,081
2017	46	-	-	-	3,398,664
Grand Total	252	640	161	22,106,000	38,890,385

Notes:

The number of HPSUs approved is based on July end of month figures as reported to the Board. The August figures are not available at this point.

The jobs created figure is based on job numbers per Annual Employment Survey (AES) in the year preceding 'year achieved' v AES for 2016. Employment figures for 2017 will not be available until 2018 when the AES for that year is complete.

The exports figure is based on exports per Annual Business Review (ABR) in the year preceding 'year achieved' v ABR 2016. Exports figures for 2017 will not be available until 2018 when the ABR survey is for that year is complete.

The payments figure is based on payments made for all HPSU grant types from the 'year achieved' to 4 September 2017. Companies do not receive their first payment immediately on grant approval and payment may be gradual over the following years.

The year achieved column refers to the HPSU Class of each respective year. This means for example, that payments to the HPSU Class in 2015, to date, is €19 million. The €19 million does not represent the total payment made to all HPSUs in the year 2015. Payments to each annual HPSU class are tranced so this means the payments column is live and subject to updating as payments are made.

Work Permits Applications

13. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding an application for a critical skills permit by a person (details supplied). [36944/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Employment Permits Section informs me that a Critical Skills Employment Permit issued in this case on the 21st July 2017.

Departmental Staff Data

14. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of political staff employed in her Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the num-

ber of civil or public service staff seconded to work within her Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; and the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [36956/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Staffing numbers in the offices of Government Ministers and Ministers of State are managed in line with Instructions issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). This includes both civil servants and ministerial personal appointments. Civil Service staff are assigned to Ministers' Private Offices and also the Constituency Office in recognition of the additional workload required of Ministers. Under the current Instructions, the staffing complement each Minister or Minister of State had in their capacity as a Member of the Oireachtas remains in place and these staff remain on the payroll of the Oireachtas.

The staffing of my offices in my capacity as Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and that of my Minister of State colleagues, and our predecessors who are covered by the years 2015 and 2016, is as set out below in tabular format. Details for 2015 and 2016 reflect the numbers in post at the end of the year in question and display the salary scales at that time. 2017 details reflect the numbers in post at present and set out the current salary scales. In this regard the Standard (PPC) Salary Scales have been referred to as a matter of course for the purpose of consistency. For more information on the various Civil Service salary scales currently in place please visit www.circulars.gov.ie and circular 8 of 2017.

In addition to the details below, I can advise the Deputy that in my capacity as Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation I have a sanctioned complement of three Special Advisers. Also in that capacity, two Garda drivers are assigned to me. I have not included these Gardaí in the table below because the salary costs are not borne by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

My colleague, John Halligan, TD, Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development, has one Special Adviser. For administrative reasons, Minister of State Halligan's Special Adviser and civilian drivers are assigned to the staffing complement of the Department of Education and Skills where Minister Halligan is also assigned and are recorded on the payroll of that Department; they are therefore not included in the table below. Similarly the civilian drivers are not listed for Damien English, TD, former Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation at my Department, as they were also assigned to the staffing complement of the Department of Education and Skills.

Finally, the Department has a Press Office in situ staffed by Departmental civil servants - generally 4 in number - who support the Ministerial team. However, these are not listed in the table below as they are not "political staff".

Ministerial Staffing Complement at 8th September 2017

Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		HEO Scale: €47,081 - €59,924
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer	2		EO Scale: €28,739 - €48,975

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	2		CO Scale €22,879 – €38,341
Minister's Constituency Office	Personal Secretary		1	Personal Secretary Scale: €26,325 - €51,268
Minister's Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	3		CO Scale €22,879 - €38,341
	Special Adviser (see note 1)		1	1 x PO Scale €81,767 - €100,333
	Special Adviser (see note 1)		1	1 x PO Scale €81,767 - €100,333
	Civilian Driver		2	see note 2

1 The appointment of a third Special Adviser is currently in progress.

2 As Tánaiste I am assigned the services of 2 Garda drivers but the associated salary costs are not borne by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Minister Pat Breen, Minister of State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Assistant Principal	1		AP Scale: €65,093 - €78,451
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		EO Scale: €28,739 - €48,975
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer	1		EO Scale: €28,739 - €48,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €22,879 – €38,341
Minister's Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €22,879 – €38,341
	Civilian Driver		2	€684.17 per week

Questions - Written Answers

Minister John Halligan, Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		EO Scale: €28,739 - €48,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	2		CO Scale: €22,879 - €38,341

Ministerial Staffing Complement at December 2016

Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		HEO scale: €46,081 - €58,294
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer	2		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	2		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
Minister's Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
	Special Adviser		1	PO Scale: (non-ppc) €75,647 - €92,550
Civilian Driver			2	€665 per week

Minister Pat Breen, Minister of State for Employment and Small Business

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer	1		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Staff Officer	1		SO Scale: €34,771 - €46,171

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
Minister's Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
	Civilian Driver		2	€665 per week

Minister John Halligan, Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	2		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341

Ministerial Staffing Complement at December 2015

Minister Richard Bruton as Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		HEO scale: €46,081 - €58,294
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer	2		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	2		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
Minister's Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
	Special Adviser (Policy)		1	€118,840
	Special Adviser (Press)		1	€87,258
	Civilian Driver		2	€665 per week

Minister Ged Nash then Minister of State (attending Cabinet) for Business and Employment

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Executive Officer		1	EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	2		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
Minister's Constituency Office	Executive Officer		1	EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341
	Special Adviser (Policy)		1	€87,258
	Special Adviser (Press)		1	€87,258
	Civilian Driver		2	€665 per week

Minister Damien English, Minister of State for Skills, Research and Innovation

Office	Grade	Civil Servants	Ministerial Appointees	Salary
Minister's Private Office	Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1		HEO scale: €46,081 - €58,294
Minister's Private Office	Staff Officer	1		EO Scale: €27,739 - €47,975
Minister's Private Office	Clerical Officer	1		CO Scale: €21,879 - €37,341

IDA Data

15. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new companies that the IDA has supported to locate in County Sligo; and the jobs created by these companies in each of the years 2002 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37152/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): This Government and IDA Ireland remain committed to regional development and to growing foreign direct investment (FDI) driven employment all over Ireland, including Sli-

go. Progress is being made towards this goal, with over half of all new Agency-supported jobs in 2016 created outside of Dublin. This trend is continuing in 2017 with increased jobs growth in the regions expected over the remainder of this year.

IDA Ireland maintains employment statistics over 10 year periods and details of job creation in County Sligo between 2007 and 2016 by the Agency's client companies are set out in the table below. Information on 2017 job creation is not yet available.

No. Of Companies & Jobs in Sligo - 2007 to 2016

-	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1. No of Companies	20	21	21	21	21	21	23	22	24	23
2. Total Jobs	2,481	2,494	2,440	2,285	2,407	2,367	2,230	2,219	2,221	2,290
3. Gross Gains		92	68	102	187	175	214	83	166	190
4. Losses		-79	-122	-257	-65	-215	-351	-94	-164	-121
5. Net Change		13	-54	-155	122	-40	-137	-11	2	69

Manufacturing Sector

16. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the progress that has been made in securing a replacement manufacturing industry for a site (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37420/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since HP Inc made the regrettable decision to close its facility in Leixlip, the IDA has been actively promoting the site to existing clients and potential investors and will continue to do so. I am hopeful that a new investor will be identified in due course and that further employment opportunities will in turn be created for the people of Leixlip and the surrounding area.

While HP Inc's decision was very disappointing, there remain over 20 other multinational companies in Kildare that employ over 10,000 people across a broad range of sectors. IDA Ireland continues to work with this client base to both sustain and grow employment further in the County.

European Innovation Partnerships

17. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if consideration has been given to Ireland joining the European Southern Observatory; if there are plans in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37428/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Through Innovation 2020, the national strategy for research and innovation, the

Government recognises that in order for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader, our research and innovation system must be open with strong international collaboration links. Membership of leading International Research Organisations is an important mechanism for facilitating this engagement.

I can confirm that serious consideration has been given to Ireland joining the European Southern Observatory, as outlined below.

In Innovation 2020, Article 6.13, the Government gave a specific commitment to initiate negotiations with ESO on Ireland's membership options. The then Minister of State for Skills, Research and Innovation, Damien English, wrote to the ESO in January 2016 to initiate the process. My department had significant engagement with the European Southern Observatory, at both official and Ministerial level, throughout 2016 and 2017.

A delegation of senior officials from my Department, Science Foundation Ireland and Enterprise Ireland visited ESO headquarters in July 2016 when they met with the Director General of the ESO, Professor Tim de Zeeuw and his senior management team. Professor de Zeeuw visited my Department in September 2016 and met with senior officials. The Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development met with Professor de Zeeuw at the European Space Agency Ministerial Council last December.

Minister of State Halligan also met with representatives of the Irish astronomy community in March 2017 to hear first-hand of their research activities and of their interests in joining ESO.

The information gathered during these engagements has provided my officials with a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits of membership. These benefits include participation in research in science and technology, opportunities for enterprise, creation of human capital/skills and promotion of STEM. However, while the potential benefits of membership of ESO are significant, the cost of membership is also significant.

My Department is currently engaged in discussions on the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan. There will be more clarity on the Department's position on ESO when the review is concluded and the funding envelope for research and innovation, as well as other Departmental projects, is finalised.

Work Permits Applications

18. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there was a delay to, or a freeze placed on, the issuing of new work permits and the renewal of work permits for work riders in the horse racing industry in each of the years 2001 to 2006, respectively; and if her Department at that time received representations from the horse racing industry to overturn the freeze. [37430/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department has been unable to establish if there were any issues relating to the awarding of employment permits for work riders in the horse riding industry in respect of the years 2001-2006. Data on the numbers of employment permits issued is available from 2005 with 216 issuing to work riders in that year, and 324 in 2006.

Up until 1 June 2009, work riders were eligible for Work Permit Employment Permits (now known as General Employment Permits). In early 2009 my Department undertook a review of the employment permit regime to ensure its ongoing relevance to the needs of the then Irish labour market. Following this review revised eligibility requirements for new employment per-

mits were applied to prospective first-time entrants to the Irish labour market from 1 June 2009. These measures were principally concerned with strengthening the qualifying conditions for the granting of new Work Permit Employment Permits to non-EEA nationals for occupations requiring lower skills and qualifications and in respect of vacancies which could increasingly be filled by Irish and other EEA citizens.

With effect from 1 June 2009, work rider became an ineligible occupation for new Work Permit Employment Permits. However, permits granted in respect of this occupation prior to that date continued to be eligible for renewal. Work riders remains on the Ineligible Categories of Employment List.

Low Pay

19. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to address low pay and poor working conditions in the private home care sector in view of the fact that the sector is being increasingly privatised as a consequence of Government and HSE policy. [37431/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Following the coming into effect of the Labour Affairs and Labour Law (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 on 1st September last, responsibility for employment rights policy and legislation transferred to my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Ireland has a comprehensive suite of employment rights legislation which provides strong protections including measures to prevent exploitation in the workplace. All employers, including those in the private homecare sector, 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.

On 2nd May last, the Government approved legislative proposals in response to the commitment in the Programme for Government to address the problems caused by the increased casualization of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious employment. The draft proposals aim to address key issues which have been identified as being areas where current employment rights legislation can be strengthened to the benefit of employees, particularly low-paid, more vulnerable workers, without imposing unnecessarily onerous burdens on employers and businesses.

It will now fall to my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to progress this legislation. In this respect, I understand that officials in her Department are working closely with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel on the drafting of this legislation and it is intended to publish this Bill in the Autumn session, subject to Government approval.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to reduce poverty levels by supporting an increase in the national minimum wage to €10.50 per hour by 2021 and the Government will rely on the annual recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on the level of adjustment to the rate each year. The Commission submitted its third recommendation to Government in July this year. The recommendation is that the rate increase by 30 cents per hour

from €9.25 to €9.55 for an adult worker. The Government will consider the recommendation in the context of Budget 2018 and, if it accepts it, the increase is likely to come into effect on 1st January 2018.

Finally, responsibility for health policy and the HSE is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Departmental Staff Data

20. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of women and men respectively employed in her Department, in tabular form. [37434/17]

21. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of men and women respectively in her Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37435/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 20 and 21 together.

The information the Deputy has requested, as at 1st September 2017, is set out in tabular form below.

TOTAL DEPARTMENTAL STAFF	OF WHICH MALE	OF WHICH FEMALE
875	357	518

GRADE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Secretary General	1	0	1
Director General, Workplace Relations Commission (Deputy Secretary Equivalent)	1	0	1
Chairperson, Labour Court (Deputy Secretary Equivalent*)	1	1	0
Assistant Secretary	7	5	2
Deputy Chairperson, Labour Court (Assistant Secretary Equivalent)	4	2	2
Director of Corporate Enforcement (Assistant Secretary Equivalent)	1	1	0
Director, Construction Contracts Adjudication Service (Director level)	1	1	0
Principal	40	23	17

GRADE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Ordinary Member, Labour Court (Principal Equivalent)	8	5	3
Ministerial Special Adviser (Principal Equivalent)	2	1	1
Legal Adviser (Principal Equivalent)	4	3	1
Assistant Principal	115	60	55
Professional Accountant Grade 1 (Assistant Principal Equivalent)	10	8	2
Solicitor (Assistant Principal Equivalent)	2	1	1
Legal Adviser (Assistant Principal Equivalent)	2	1	1
TOTAL	199	112	87

*Remuneration is analogous to the Deputy Secretary Grade.

Departmental Expenditure

22. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the cost her Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37436/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department, including a number of its Offices, holds a number of Public Bank Accounts to enable it to conduct its financial transactions, including paying staff and suppliers and collecting payment for services provided to clients of the Department and its Offices. The Department's Public Bank Accounts are currently held with Danske Bank. This follows on from a procurement process conducted by the Department for the provision of banking services. Previously, the Department held accounts with Bank of Ireland and Investec and a number of its Offices held accounts with Ulster Bank. The Department received the necessary sanction to hold these accounts from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Insofar as banking fees are concerned, details of the bank charges and fees, as well as interest earned in each of the past five years, paid in respect of the aforementioned accounts are set out in the table below.

Bank charges	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	€	€	€	€	€
Ulster Bank	1,531	1,236	834	420	526
Ulster Bank (interest received)	-741	-689	-715	-1,025	-1,202

Bank of Ireland	935	973	1,096	658	742
Investec	306	56	0	50	14
Total	2,031	1,576	1,215	103	80

The majority of the Department's financial transactions are effected through Electronic Funds Transfer. It is the case, however, that a number of the Department's business units, including a number of its Offices, provide services to clients in respect of which charges are imposed. Clients have the facility to pay for certain services by means of credit and/or debit card. To facilitate payment by card, the business units concerned entered into agreements with a number of merchant acquiring and gateway services providers. These agreements are delivered under a supplier framework agreement entered into by the Office of Government Procurement, which runs until June 2020.

The payments made to the merchant acquiring and gateway services providers concerned to facilitate payment by debit and credit cards in each of the past five years are set out in the table below.

Payment service charges	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	€	€	€	€	€
Elavon	129,802	121,397	125,821	111,247	132,606
Local Government Management Board (LGMA)*	22,961	22,873	24,351	25,470	16,610
Realex	-	-	-	-	2,525
Total	152,763	144,270	150,172	136,717	151,741

*The payments to the Local Government Management Board are in respect of payment card charges incurred prior to the introduction of the OGP framework agreement.

Services for People with Disabilities

23. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which her Department is improving services and increasing supports for persons with disabilities. [37659/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department, and the agencies under its remit, are involved in a number of measures which are aimed at improving services and supports for disabled persons.

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 prohibit discrimination on nine grounds including the ground of disability. The Acts apply to prospective employees in claiming discrimination in access to employment. Any person who believes that s/he has experienced discrimination which is contrary to the Employment Equality Acts may seek redress by referring a complaint to the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission, which is an Office of my Department.

Ireland's new National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility, 'Towards Responsible

Business 2017-2020', was launched in June 2017. It is aimed at supporting businesses and organisations across all sectors to adopt responsible business practices and improve their sustainability, competitiveness and ability to attract and retain talent, whilst also fostering social cohesion and protecting the environment. The Plan aims to encourage businesses to develop strategies to integrate diversity and to promote gender equality at all levels in the workplace and for the employment of people with disabilities.

The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Centre of Excellence facilitated a training event for 18 LEO staff, who interact with people from disadvantaged or underrepresented communities, including persons with disabilities, in Q.1 2017. The training event addressed the additional and distinctive challenges faced by people from these communities in terms of starting their own business and how LEO staff can be better prepared in terms of appreciating the client's unique situation. There are three similar training events scheduled for Q.4 2017.

Enterprise Ireland is actively working with partners across Government to support the vision of the Strategy for Employment for People with Disabilities. In line with Enterprise Ireland's strategic objectives, the agency is actively supporting inclusiveness in this area as follows:

- Working with the National Disability Authority, the agency is formulating a strategy focused on fostering and supporting entrepreneurship for people with disabilities.

- Engaging with the National Disability Authority's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, the agency is looking at routes to commercialising universal design product ideas from National Disability Authority's Centre's annual Design Challenge. This includes providing general advice on funding and IP to the commended entries under the Homes for Smart Aging Competition.

In addition, in Q2 Enterprise Ireland hosted a knowledge sharing event under the Employer Support Initiative in conjunction with the National Disability Authority.

Officials of my Department are currently assisting the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in drafting the Copyright and Related Rights (Miscellaneous Intellectual Property) Bill. One of the primary intentions of this Bill is to improve access to copyright works for persons with a disability. The Bill will allow an individual to make a personal copy of a work modified to meet their particular needs. Moreover, certain designated bodies will be able to make multiple copies of a work to meet the specific needs of persons with a disability and to share these with other designated bodies as well as directly to individuals with a disability.

Separately, Ireland has recently reached agreement at EU level on the text of a Directive and Regulation that will jointly ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or otherwise Print Disabled. Following publication of the Directive in the Official Journal of the European Union, Ireland will have 12 months to transpose it into Irish law; the Regulation will automatically enter into force after 12 months. My Department is actively preparing for this transposition, to ensure that it is carried out quickly and effectively within the deadline.

The Companies Registration Office (CRO) has a dedicated Access Officer who provides the assistance necessary to enable customers with disabilities to effectively access all its services. CRO have recently moved to a new premises which is wheelchair accessible. The website is designed to ease access for customers with disabilities with a variety of technical measures to ensure accessibility. CRO is in a position to assist customers with disabilities by providing documents at no charge in a form which will support their needs.

My Department is also committed to complying with the Code of Practice for Appointment

of Persons with Disabilities to Positions in the Civil Service and Certain Public Bodies. This sets out the principles and standards to be applied in the case of external and internal recruitment of persons with disabilities and enables the Civil Service and other public bodies to fulfil their obligations to comply with government policy in this regard.

Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 sets out the following obligation on Government Departments and public services bodies with regard to the employment of people with disabilities:

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

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

- Public bodies must report on an annual basis to a statutory monitoring committee in their parent Department on the number of people with disabilities in their employment and the measures they are taking to promote and support their employment. The monitoring committees in turn submit their reports on such compliance to the Minister of their parent Department and the National Disability Authority (NDA).

Departments stats as at 31 December 2016

DJEI and Agencies* which report through the Department to the National Disability Authority (NDA) on compliance with meeting the 3% target for the employment of persons with a disability (known as Reporting under "Part 5 of the Disability Act").	Total number of employees.	Percentage of employees with a disability under the definition in the Disability Act 2005.
Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	840	5.16%
Competition and Consumer Protection Commission	70	7.1%
Enterprise Ireland	587	3.41%
Health & Safety Authority	167	3.59%
IDA Ireland	307	5.86%
InterTrade Ireland	38	2.63%
National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)	133	3.76%
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	80	1.25%
Science Foundation Ireland	48	4.17%

Brexit Issues

24. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans specifically in the Border region to interact with, inform and assure businesses ahead of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37660/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I fully appreciate the importance of ensuring that Irish businesses, including those located in border regions, are best able to withstand the pressures that Brexit may exert.

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

The 2017 Action Plan for Jobs has also identified a range of actions to facilitate the resilience of Irish businesses in anticipation of Brexit. Seventeen actions are aimed at promoting market diversification, improving competitiveness, realising opportunities in foreign markets and attracting research and innovation talent to Ireland. Three actions focus on the specific sectors of agri-food and tourism which is a very important aspect of cross border trade. All twenty actions will be of particular benefit to the border region with one of them (Action 13) focusing on delivering economic growth and jobs through the North-South Council and outreach activities.

The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is a key policy response, in the context of Brexit, for supporting employment growth in the Border region. The Plan aims to deliver 28,000 extra jobs in the counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Louth by 2020. The Plan is stimulating job creation across the region by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector.

There has been a substantial improvement in the North East / North West region since the commencement of the Regional Action Plan for Jobs initiative in Q1 2015, with 4,700 more people in work in the region by Q1 2017. In addition, the unemployment rate in the region has fallen from 10.2% in Q1 2015 to 7.5 % over the same period, compared to the national rate of 6.7%. The value of the Regional Plans, with all of the key stakeholders involved, means that more than ever, we have a finger on the pulse of each region.

Enterprise Ireland continues to support companies, including their many clients in the border counties, on a one to one basis to enhance their competitiveness and capability and build on their success in existing and new markets. Enterprise Ireland's 'Brexit SME Scorecard', a new interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit, is available on www.prepareforbrexit.ie. This tool is a starting point for SME management teams looking to develop an action plan to help mitigate risks and leverage opportunities which may arise from Brexit.

Finally I am continuing to look at new ways to support companies to address the Brexit challenge. In particular work is progressing on a proposed Brexit-related Working Capital Guarantee Scheme and also scoping out the need for a longer term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in investing for a post-Brexit environment.

IDA Site Visits

25. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of IDA visits to counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath and throughout the country in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37661/17]

35. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of IDA site visits in each county in quarter 2 of 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38293/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 25 and 35 together.

The table below outlines the number of IDA Ireland sponsored site visits to each County of Ireland for the period encompassing 2015 to the second quarter of 2017.

I want to emphasise that the IDA remains committed to increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) in every region of Ireland by 30-40% by the end of the Agency's current strategy in 2019. The IDA continues, with that goal in mind, to highlight the benefits of expanding or locating in the regions to its client base and it makes every effort to ensure that FDI is spread as widely as possible across the country. The final decision as to where to invest, however, always rests with the company concerned.

IDA Site Visits by County from 2015 to Q2 2017

County	2015	2016	Q2 2017
Carlow	1	9	4
Cavan	0	2	1
Clare	12	18	17
Cork	48	49	21
Donegal	5	7	1
Dublin	242	284	155
Galway	41	42	34
Kerry	6	3	2
Kildare	7	8	2
Kilkenny	10	10	3
Laois	4	6	0
Leitrim	8	8	2
Limerick	40	49	17
Longford	2	6	6
Louth	20	24	10
Mayo	3	5	2
Meath	7	8	0
Monaghan	2	2	1
Offaly	8	4	1
Roscommon	2	1	1
Sligo	15	20	8
Tipperary	12	8	5
Waterford	31	17	4
Westmeath	28	36	22
Wexford	4	7	2
Wicklow	7	5	2
Total	565	638	323

Job Creation

26. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and In-

novation the number of jobs being created as a result of a sale (details supplied); when they are likely to come on stream; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37662/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, I am delighted that the sale of the Bose Plant in Carrickmacross has been completed.

However I understand that at this stage, information relating to the purchaser of the Plant is commercially sensitive.

As yet therefore, there is no information available in relation to the number of jobs being created as a result of the sale.

Brexit Staff

27. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37985/17]

28. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38001/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 27 and 28 together.

The work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges in its work plans for 2017 across all its Divisions.

A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is currently supported by 1 Principal, 2 Assistant Principals, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. An additional HEO/AO is being recruited for the Brexit Unit. Many other areas of the Department are impacted by Brexit and on foot of a recently completed workforce planning exercise for the Department in respect of the period 2017-2019 these posts, plus others which are not solely Brexit-impacted are being filled as staff can be recruited.

The full year salary costs for the Brexit Unit itself, including the additional staffing resources to be recruited, is estimated at approximately €570,000. In addition to this, funding is available to undertake appropriate research, and in light of the substantial programme of visits ongoing and planned at Ministerial and Official level to other capital cities as part of our outreach to our European partners, there will be associated travel and subsistence costs.

Separately, resources have been made available to IDA, EI, SFI and the HSA to recruit additional staff consequent on Brexit with significant progress made at this time in filling those posts.

Construction Industry

29. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation; the mechanisms her Department employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38017/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department does not have any role in tracking or monitoring inflation levels in the construction sector and therefore does not employ any mechanisms to establish these.

Public Services Card

30. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she or bodies and agencies under the remit of her Department plan to make services or payments dependant on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependant on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38141/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department and the bodies under its remit do not plan to make any services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card.

Brexit Staff

31. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of additional staff to be made available to each State agency under her remit to specifically deal with Brexit; the number of these staff that have been recruited to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38180/17]

53. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an additional €3 million has been allocated by her Department in 2017 to the evolving Brexit scenario; the number of full-time and part-time staff hired since 1 January 2017 under this budget allocation; the amount allocated to each State agency to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38395/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 53 together.

An additional €3 million was secured for my Department in respect of Pay in Budget 2017 targeted specifically to assist with increased staffing needs for the Department and a number of our Agencies to deal with the evolving Brexit scenario. These funds are enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies to recruit additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers in the context of the workload associated with Brexit. These numbers may grow, by agreement with the Department, as Agencies allocate additional Own Resource Income, to recruit further staff to work on “Brexit-related” activity.

The additional €3m was allocated as follows:

- Enterprise Ireland (€1,700,000)
- IDA Ireland (€750,000)

- Science Foundation Ireland (€150,000)
- The Health and Safety Authority (€150,000), and
- The Department itself (€250,000).

The remaining Agencies that come under the remit of my Department – the National Standards Authority of Ireland, The Personal Injuries Assessment Board, The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and The Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority have not sought to recruit any additional staff specifically for Brexit related issues.

Of the 39 sanctioned Brexit-related posts for Enterprise Ireland (EI), 26 have been filled to date, all of which are full-time positions, and recruitment is ongoing for the remaining 13 posts. In this regard, EI is confident that it has partnered with the most appropriate recruitment agencies around the world and in Ireland to support them in the identification of appropriately qualified high-calibre candidates, increasing the speed of filling the outstanding posts.

Insofar as the IDA Ireland is concerned, 10 Brexit-related posts have been filled to date, all of which are full-time positions, and the recruitment process for the remaining three is under way. IDA Ireland has undertaken a rigorous recruitment process across a wide variety of channels to ensure that the best candidates are identified for these roles.

For Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), it expects a candidate to commence in one of its Brexit-related posts in late October with the two remaining posts anticipated to be filled shortly thereafter. The three posts on offer are full-time positions. In addition, SFI has a number of serving staff allocated Brexit related responsibilities and an internal Brexit team led by one of its Senior Directors which focuses on Brexit related initiatives.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) reports that it has commenced a recruitment process to fill two Brexit-related posts and it is intended that they will be filled during Q4 2017. Both posts on offer will be full-time positions. Sanction has also recently been sought for an additional Brexit-related post for the HSA which is being actively considered by the Department.

With regard to my own Department, a dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by a staff complement of 5. An additional staffing resource is currently being recruited to support the Brexit Unit.

The work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges across all its Divisions and actively keeps requirements in this regard under review. Additionally, it is intended to review the Department's workforce plan (2017-2019) as part of the Department's business planning processes for 2018 and, naturally, the demands attendant on servicing the Brexit agenda will continue to be a priority.

Zero-hour Contracts

32. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding zero-hour contracts; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38236/17]

38. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and In-

novation when the heads of the Bill regarding protections for workers on insecure low hour contracts will be published; when Second Stage of the Bill will be taken in Dáil Éireann; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38298/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32 and 38 together.

Following the coming into effect of the Labour Affairs and Labour Law (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017 from 1st September, responsibility for employment rights policy and legislation transferred to my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

On 2nd May, 2017 the Government approved draft legislative proposals in response to the commitment in the Programme for Government to address the problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious employment.

The proposals aim to address a number of issues which have been identified as being areas where current employment rights legislation can be strengthened to the benefit of employees, particularly low-paid and more vulnerable employees, without imposing unnecessarily onerous burdens on employers and businesses.

The legislative proposals will address the following key issues:

- Ensuring that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and in particular, their core terms at an early stage of their employment.
- Strengthening the provisions around minimum payments to low-paid, vulnerable workers who may be called in to work for a period but not provided with that work.
- Prohibiting zero-hour contracts, except in cases of genuine casual work or emergency cover or short-term relief work for the employer.
- Ensuring that workers on low hour contracts who consistently work more hours each week than is provided for in their contracts of employment, are entitled to be placed in a band of hours that reflects the reality of the hours they have worked over an extended period.
- Reinforcing the anti-victimisation provisions for employees who try to invoke a right under these proposals.

It will now fall to my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to progress this legislation. In this respect, I understand that officials in her Department are working closely with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on the drafting of this legislation and it is intended to publish this Bill in the Autumn session, subject to Government approval.

Enterprise Support Services Provision

33. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of business incubation centres; and the amount each centre received in Exchequer funding in each of the years from 2014 to 2016, in tabular form. [38255/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Enterprise Ireland, an agency of my Department supports companies in every region of Ireland to start and scale, innovate and remain competitive in international markets, now and in the future. In order to help its clients achieve employment growth, Enterprise Ireland

uses a developmental approach across all aspects of clients' needs, including business development, sales and marketing capabilities, innovation and R&D activity, technology development, continuous competitiveness and lean improvements, leadership and management development, and access to finance. To support entrepreneurs, start-ups and early stage SMEs, Enterprise Ireland has supported the establishment of business incubation centres across the county, as detailed below:

Campus Incubation Programme

Under the Campus Incubation Programme, Enterprise Ireland funding has supported the development of a national network of business innovation centres and specialist bio-incubation facilities. Incubators now exist on every university and Institute of technology campus in the country. Such facilities are internationally recognised as an important element of public assistance for technology-intensive start-ups. These facilities are also an important driver of regional development with the majority of companies remaining in their region after they have completed their incubation period.

Campus Incubation Centres provide critical space for research-driven start-up companies and make available a wide range of support services and business mentoring. Tenant companies benefit from the research environment, being able to tap into mentors and the facilities of the host institution; the institutions benefit from having a focal point for entrepreneurial activity on campus and a commercialisation route for their research. The companies involved typically have good links with the host institution, are in hi-tech sectors and have high growth potential.

At present, there are over 359 companies in Enterprise Ireland funded incubation centres employing 1,827 people. In the period 2014 -2016, Enterprise Ireland invested €2.9 million across 4 campus incubation centres, see the following table for further details.

Client Name	Payments 2014	Payments 2015	Payments 2016
National University of Ireland – Maynooth	-	€1,144,864	-
Dublin Institute of Technology	-	€1,072,885	€600,000
Letterkenny Institute of Technology	€13,000	-	-
University of Limerick	€84,165	-	-
Total Payments 2014-2016	€97,165	€2,217,749	€600,000

The Irish EU-Business and Innovation Centres (BICs)

The BICs (namely Cork BIC, Dublin BIC, South East BIC and West BIC) work in partnership with Enterprise Ireland to assess, advise, validate and progress early stage-business plans of Enterprise Ireland clients to an investor ready stage-point, with an objective of driving the number of High Potential Start-Ups approved each year by Enterprise Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place with each BIC. This provides a framework for agreement of service levels and performance management in respect of the funding administered by Enterprise Ireland (EI) on behalf of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI), to the BICs located in Ireland. Funding administered to each BIC, in line with their agreed SLA over the period 2014 -2016, is presented in the follow-

ing table.

-	2014(€)	2015(€)	2016(€)
South East BIC	438,069	390,149	358,160
West BIC	511,512	581,194	441,132
Cork BIC	580,304	442,783	404,027
Dublin BIC	1,114,887	1,177,698	1,376,541
Total	2,644,772	2,591,823	2,579,861

Regional Accelerators

Accelerators can and do play a role in enhancing the start-up ecosystem nationally. The Action Plan for Jobs 2015 called on Enterprise Ireland to increase the level of start-up support in Ireland with one of the associated actions being a scheme to support commercially managed accelerators. In 2015 Enterprise Ireland launched the 2015 -2017 Accelerator Development Scheme. The objective of this call was to increase the number of accelerators operating in the Irish market to support entrepreneurship, company creation and job creation in new manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services companies in Ireland. The first call under this Scheme, with a budget of up to €3 million to leverage private investment, was open to applications via a competitive process for accelerators in regions outside Dublin. In 2017, Enterprise Ireland announced funding to the following accelerators:

- **Propeller Shannon start-up accelerator:** The Propeller Shannon start-up accelerator, a partnership between Shannon Group’s International Aviation Services Centre (IASC), DCU Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurs, Boeing, and Datalex, and supported by Enterprise Ireland, aims to drive the development of innovative Irish and international start-up companies in the aviation sector.

- **NDRC at Porter Shed Accelerator:** This accelerator will provide intensive commercial support and expert mentoring to high potential startup businesses with a digital focus in the West Region.

Additional regional accelerators will be announced by Enterprise Ireland in due course.

Brexit Staff

34. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 105 of 11 July 2017, when a reply will issue. [38292/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy had requested information on “the number of staff recruited since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 in all individual State agencies and bodies under her aegis including the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, InterTradeIreland and the HSA; the number of staff in each such agency and body recruited since 1 January 2017, in tabular form” and my Department has now been able to bring the relevant data together as follows:

Agency	Recruited between 1 June 2016 – 31 December 2016	Recruited between 1 January 2017 – 4 September 2017
PIAB	3	5
SFI	4	7
CCPC	18	10

Agency	Recruited between 1 June 2016 – 31 December 2016	Recruited between 1 January 2017 – 4 September 2017
IAASA	2	4
IDA Ireland	31	37
HSA	12	11
Enterprise Ireland	54	68
NSAI	9	5
InterTradeIreland*	1	9

* Of the 10 staff recruited by InterTradeIreland, ITI has identified 5 of these as replacement posts.

On establishment, staff in the Local Enterprise Offices were employed either by the Local Authority for each LEO or by Enterprise Ireland. Any new staff appointed to the LEOs since establishment is a matter for the Local Authorities. Under an agreement between this Department and the Local Authorities the total minimum complement of staff for the LEOs nationwide is 178.

While not all of these roles are Brexit-specific; the work of many agencies is impacted by Brexit and my Department has prioritised the Brexit challenges and works closely with the agencies, actively keeping requirements in this regard under review.

Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 25.

Employment Data

36. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number employed in companies supported by Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, based on data in the annual employment survey over the period from 2010 to 2016, by county, in tabular form. [38296/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Please find in the following excel spreadsheet the total number employed (full-time and part-time) in companies supported by Enterprise Ireland, IDA and Údarás na Gaeltachta based on data in the Annual Employment Survey 2016. The data is broken out by county and provided for the years 2010 to 2016, in tabular form.

Total Employment (full-time and part-time)

County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Carlow	2,866	3,216	3,347	3,441	3,556	3,629	3,615
Cavan	5,404	5,444	5,386	5,327	5,684	6,062	6,424
Clare	9,318	9,235	9,065	9,102	9,613	9,957	10,106
Cork	42,030	44,503	46,600	48,474	51,013	56,595	59,599
Donegal	7,169	7,409	7,271	7,609	7,831	8,498	8,866
Dublin	111,515	114,185	118,358	125,213	133,080	142,563	152,211
Galway	19,844	21,762	22,629	23,313	23,748	25,325	27,337
Kerry	5,982	6,083	6,421	6,587	7,128	7,347	7,524
Kildare	16,623	16,369	16,654	17,125	18,016	18,970	18,776
Kilkenny	3,874	3,794	4,113	3,977	4,436	5,789	5,965

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County	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Laois	1,422	1,288	1,237	1,311	1,305	1,411	1,498
Leitrim	1,641	1,467	1,307	1,052	1,154	1,235	1,335
Limerick	13,067	13,179	13,821	14,446	14,801	15,681	18,105
Longford	2,608	2,476	2,509	2,707	3,111	3,330	3,551
Louth	6,848	6,980	7,374	8,159	8,669	9,116	9,605
Mayo	7,650	7,908	7,881	8,306	8,622	8,583	8,882
Meath	6,352	6,598	6,772	7,405	7,996	8,526	8,732
Monaghan	4,275	4,333	4,439	4,614	4,725	4,926	5,239
Offaly	3,935	3,988	3,989	4,156	4,406	4,701	4,870
Roscommon	2,126	2,165	2,175	2,322	2,462	2,624	2,673
Sligo	3,687	3,836	3,894	3,892	3,903	3,769	3,827
Tipperary	9,525	8,741	8,600	8,128	8,430	8,777	8,724
Waterford	10,818	10,097	9,674	9,878	10,542	11,360	11,992
Westmeath	4,831	4,900	5,206	5,493	5,902	6,092	6,224
Wexford	6,845	6,668	6,670	6,978	7,009	7,194	7,447
Wicklow	6,003	5,616	5,776	5,650	5,772	5,919	5,914
Total	316,258	322,240	331,168	344,665	362,914	387,979	409,041

Health and Safety Authority Expenditure

37. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of funding the Health and Safety Authority spent on all safety initiatives; the number of inspections it carried out in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38297/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The following sets out the number of inspections and investigations and spend on safety initiatives by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) for the period 2011 - 2017.

Year	Inspections and Investigations
2011	15,340
2012	13,835
2013	12,244
2014	10,719
2015	10,880
2016	10,460
2017 to 1st Sept.	6,790 recorded year to date 01 September 2017

Year	Spend on Safety Initiatives
2011	€1.567m
2012	€1.907m
2013	€1.595m
2014	€1.154m
2015	€1.776m

Year	Spend on Safety Initiatives
2016	€1.297m
2017 to 30th August	€760,000 estimated

Health and Safety Authority Inspectors carry out inspections across all work sectors and work activities that come under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Chemicals Act 2008. Most inspections are targeted at the high risk sectors such as construction, agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, mines, quarries, transport of dangerous goods by road, or the chemical sectors. Other inspections can be part of a particular safety awareness campaign e.g. on manual handling, on slips, trips or falls or on compliance with the REACH Regulation.

The HSA produces a Programme of Work each year setting out its plan for all areas of its work, including inspection targets. The 2017 Programme of Work set a target of 11,100 inspections and investigations. To date (1st Sept. 2017) the HSA has carried out 61% of its target number of inspections and investigations for the year.

Question No. 38 answered with Question No. 32.

Brexit Issues

39. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Brexit readiness vouchers from InterTradeIreland that have been availed of since being established, by county; and the total value of such vouchers, in tabular form. [38301/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Details on the number of Brexit readiness vouchers approved to date by InterTradeIreland (ITI) from the funding provided by my Department to the body for its Brexit related initiatives are as follows:

County	Number	Value
Dublin	3	€6,000
Sligo	1	€2,000
Kilkenny	1	€2,000
Galway	2	€4,000

ITI is currently engaging with 39 further businesses about participating in this scheme.

Brexit Issues

40. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she or her Department made representations to the EU Commission's Advisory Committee on State Aid on changing the state aid rules regarding protecting exposed sectors here and safeguarding jobs from a hard Brexit scenario. [38303/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The EU Commission's Advisory Committee on State Aid is comprised of Commission members and Member States' representatives. The Commission calls meetings of the Advisory Committee on State Aid to consult with the Committee on any changes to State Aid rules and regulations in advance of the final implementation of these changes.

As a consultative Committee it is not a forum for direct representations from Member States.

Nor does the Committee itself propose changes to the State Aid rules.

The Committee last met in November 2016 to discuss the revision of the General Block Exemption Regulation and its extension to ports and airports. A date for a further meeting of the Committee has not been set.

The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require to address challenges arising as a result of the Brexit Referendum, which is likely to represent a structural shift in the UK trading relations. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

A lot can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. My Department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses. This work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance with the EU Commission through the proper channels.

Job Initiatives

41. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a special assignee relief programme that is focused on SMEs in order to attract highly skilled talent to work in sectors that have skills and labour shortages; and if she made representations or submissions to the Minister for Finance on this subject in the context of budget 2018. [38304/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government introduced the Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP) in Finance Act 2012. The aim of the relief is to reduce the cost to employers of assigning skilled individuals in their companies from abroad to take up positions in their Irish based operations, thereby facilitating the creation of jobs and the development and expansion of business in Ireland.

Measures such as this complement the range of initiatives to support export-led growth as part of the Action Plan for Jobs, which has seen 230,000 extra people in work since its launch in 2012.

The budgetary process is currently under way and I am liaising with my colleague, the Minister for Finance, and his department with regards to meeting the needs of businesses of all sizes in order to best address the challenges they face and to assist them achieve their potential.

Workplace Relations Commission

42. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on recent publications by the Workplace Relations Commission regarding housing assistance grant cases (details supplied). [38306/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body

which was established on 1st October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015. The WRC's core services include the provision of adjudication on employment and equality complaints, early resolution, mediation, conciliation, facilitation and advisory services, 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.

The WRC is independent in the exercise of its quasi-judicial function and I as Minister have no direct involvement in its day to day operations.

The Equal Status Acts 2000-2015, prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, the provision of accommodation and access to education, on any of nine grounds. The Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 inserted a new ground in the provision of accommodation only; the "housing assistance" ground. Since 2015, the law has outlawed discrimination on the housing assistance ground at all stages in the provision of rental accommodation - in advertising and making offers of new tenancies, in bringing existing tenancies to an end and in the treatment of tenants during the term of an existing tenancy.

The WRC plays a critically important role for persons who want to make a complaint about any discrimination, for example discrimination by landlords on the basis of being in receipt of a Housing Assistance Payment. Making a complaint is free and can be done on line, and both sides can expect the WRC to give them both a hearing and a decision promptly.

I understand that equal status complaints accounted for almost 5% of all complaints made to the WRC. It is expected that this pattern will continue into the future.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

43. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has had discussions with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs regarding parents who work shifts or are on zero or low hours contracts and potentially missing out on the affordable childcare scheme due to their variable work patterns. [38307/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, who has policy responsibility for the Affordable Childcare Scheme that the legislation underpinning the scheme is currently being drafted. The Heads of Bill and General Scheme, which were published in February, proposed that where an applicant and an applicant's partner are engaged in work or study, they will be eligible for up to 40 hours of subsidised childcare per week, for each child. The definition of "work" proposed in Head 12 is "any form of employment, self-employment, apprenticeship, or participation in a statutory or State-sponsored labour market activation programme that requires attendance or availability either every week on a frequent and regular basis, including short-term periods of leave from any such work (including, but not limited to, sick leave, annual leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, adoptive leave and carer's leave), but excluding career breaks". I am further informed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs that this definition, if applied, would include parents who work shifts or are on zero or low hours contracts, provided they either work - or are required to be available for work - on a frequent and regular basis and that the definition would not prevent parents benefitting from the affordable childcare subsidy simply because their work patterns are variable.

Enterprise Support Schemes

44. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific targets set for agencies under her auspices following the recent comments by the Taoiseach to double the Team Ireland footprint overseas by 2025. [38308/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In January 2017 Enterprise Ireland published its strategy for the period 2017-2020. The strategy was developed in the context of Brexit and seeks to inspire and drive Irish enterprise to ‘Build Scale and Expand Reach’ and has ambitious targets. Despite economic and market uncertainties, Enterprise Ireland’s strategic targets are to:

- Assist clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 and to sustain the existing record level of jobs
- Grow annual exports by €5bn to €26bn per annum
- Increase the level of spend in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020.
- Inspiring more companies to have global ambition.

Enterprise Ireland’s will deliver on its ambitious targets by:

- Driving innovation in Irish enterprise to unprecedented levels through new supports to reach the target of €1.25bn in R&D expenditure per annum by 2020.
- Improving the competitiveness of Irish companies through Enterprise Ireland’s Lean programmes and new client engagement model, which will provide targeted supports based on agreed milestones.
- Increasing the diversification of Enterprise Ireland’s client company exports into new markets, with two-thirds of exports going beyond the UK. This includes a major focus on the Eurozone where Enterprise Ireland are targeting a 50 per cent increase in exports. In May 2017 Enterprise Ireland launched announced a new Eurozone Strategy to drive this. This strategy will be accompanied by a new ‘Irish Advantage’ campaign which will target Eurozone buyers to promote Irish innovation in key Brexit impacted sector.

Enterprise Ireland’s overseas structure through its network of 33 overseas offices and its extended Pathfinder (Trade Consultant) network provides client companies with access to Incubation and Hot-Desking Facilities, local market knowledge on a sectoral basis, introductions to buyers/suppliers/partners, and market intelligence such as competitor analysis, identification of professional services etc.

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

To support the implementation of Enterprise Ireland’s strategy the agency employs 686.5 people across a national and international network of offices. Within these figure, 145.5 staff are located in Enterprise Ireland’s international offices. As part of its strategic response to Brexit, EI received sanction to create 39 additional posts. Of these 39 Brexit related posts, 26 have been filled to date and are included in the total figure above.

In 2015, IDA Ireland launched its five year strategy, ‘Winning: Foreign Direct Investment

2015-2019. This Strategy, along with my Departments Action Plan for Jobs 2017, outlines the following targets:

- Complete construction of new advance buildings in Sligo, Castlebar and Tralee.
- Generate closer links and business opportunities between Irish owned and foreign owned enterprise to achieve increased global sourcing sales.
- Increase investment in each region outside of Dublin in line with IDA Ireland's strategy of increasing investment in each region outside Dublin by 30 to 40% by 2019.
- Target 7,000 net new jobs in 2017 through the creation of new jobs and sustaining current employment in existing IDA companies.
- Work to win another 180 FDI projects in 2017 including investment from high growth and emerging markets together with new forms of FDI.

IDA Ireland operates an overseas office network consisting of approximately 73 executives, in 20 Offices in 12 countries across the world.

IDA Ireland has been allocated funding for ten extra posts specifically designated to deal with Brexit, seven of these have been filled to date. The remaining three are expected to be filled in the near future. IDA Ireland is also engaging on an ongoing basis with client companies from all over Ireland regarding the commercial impact of Brexit on Irish firms.

Expansion of the resources of EI and IDA in the context of increasing Ireland's global footprint will be the subject of discussions with the relevant Departments and Agencies in due course.

Enterprise Support Services Expenditure

45. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of Exchequer and European moneys invested in the enterprise stabilisation fund in each of the years from 2009 to 2011; the number of businesses that received funding from the fund; the average amount of funding per enterprise; the amount of funding drawn down under the scheme; the number of jobs that were supported, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38311/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Enterprise Stabilisation Fund (ESF) was established by Government to support viable but vulnerable exporting companies who were experiencing difficulties due to the economic crisis which started in 2008. €100m was allocated to the fund to the end of 2010. Client companies of Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Údarás Na Gaeltachta and Shannon Development across all sectors within manufacturing and internationally traded services were eligible to apply. The fund was administered by Enterprise Ireland.

The State Aid basis for the Enterprise Stabilisation Fund is the Temporary Aid Framework 2008. Based on this derogation from the EU, the ESF was open for applications for the years 2009 and 2010.

Funding was in the form of preference shares, supporting a range of activities including market development, productivity improvements, cost reduction and product development.

Enterprise Ireland approved €80.4m under the ESF and paid out €80.018m. 223 companies

were approved funding and the average funding per enterprise was €375,000. Based on the most recent analysis, this investment supported 7,140 jobs. The majority of the companies supported are still trading as viable entities, contributing to the Irish economy. In addition, over €22m has been redeemed to date and redemption of the shares will continue to be sought.

Table 1 shows the total amount invested/drawn down by year over the period 2007 -2010.

Table 1: total amount invested/drawn down by year over the period 2007 -2010, under the Enterprise Stabilisation Fund.

Year	Investment Amount (€)
2007	180,337
2008	7,028,316
2009	56,029,434
2010	16,780,000
Grand Total	80,018,087

Employment Support Services

46. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount of Exchequer and European moneys invested in the employment subsidy scheme in each of the years 2009 to 2011; the number of businesses that received funding from the scheme; the average amount of funding per enterprise; the amount of funding drawn down under the scheme; the number of part-time and full-time jobs that were supported, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38312/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Employment Subsidy Scheme (ESS) was launched in August 2009 to help employees retain jobs and employers to retain productive capacity. The objective was to provide an employment subsidy to vulnerable but viable manufacturing and/or internationally traded services enterprises engaged in exporting. The ESS was administered by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of my Department and the funds were provided from the Vote for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation with an allocation of €115.8m from the Department and the remaining €200k being met from Enterprise Ireland's operational budget.

The scheme entailed the payment of a subsidy of €9,100 per annum towards full time employees (working an average of 35 hours or more per week) or €6,370 for part time employees (working an average of 21 hours or more per week). A key aspect of the scheme was the multiplier effect. This saw qualifying companies commit to retaining additional jobs.

Companies declared, at the time of application, the number of employees that were at risk of being made redundant and employee subsidies could not exceed this number. As part of the scheme, employers committed to retain a defined number of jobs for each job subsidised.

Overall, the State subsidised 14,124 jobs (full time and part time) at a cost of €116 million. This led to a commitment to retain those jobs and an additional 79,234 (a total of 93,358). The subsidies were paid to 1,521 companies where 34,681 jobs were declared to be at risk with an average payment of €76.3k per company.

Table 1 shows the total grants paid under the Employment Subsidy Scheme from 2009-2011.

Table 1: total grants paid under the Employment Subsidy Scheme from 2009-2011.

Year	2009 (€m)	2010 (€m)	2011 (€m)	Total
ESS grants paid	18.2	95.7	2.1	116.0m

Please note: While the ESS ended in 2010, Enterprise Ireland paid claim applications up to March 2011 in cases where full supporting claim documentation was not received until after the closing date.

Enterprise Support Services Expenditure

47. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Irish enterprises that have applied for funding under the SME window provided by the European fund for strategic investments; the number of Irish enterprises that have drawn down funds to date; and the amount of funding drawn down by Irish enterprises in euro. [38313/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) is a joint initiative of the European Investment Bank, European Investment Fund and the European Commission, established to help overcome the current investment gap in the EU by mobilising private financing for strategic investments.

While the Minister for Finance is responsible for the Irish political and policy input on the shape of EFSI, including its ongoing review, it is in fact EFSI itself which is charged with day to day operations independent of all EU Governments including the Irish Government.

EFSI does however publish project lists on its website, and, in this regard, I would direct the Deputy's attention towards this information, which can be filtered by country and by sector, including under the heading of 'smaller companies'.

The website address is www.eib.org/efsi/efsi-projects/index.htm

Enterprise Support Services Expenditure

48. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Irish enterprises that have applied for funding under the infrastructure and innovation window provided by the European fund for strategic investments; the number of Irish enterprises that have drawn down funds to date; and the amount of funding drawn down by Irish enterprises in euro. [38314/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is an initiative launched jointly by the EIB Group (European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) and the European Commission to help overcome the current investment gap in the EU by mobilising private financing for strategic investments. EFSI is one of the three pillars of the Investment Plan for Europe that aims to revive investment in strategic projects around Europe to ensure that money reaches the real economy. EFSI has been integrated into the EIB Group and projects supported by EFSI are subject to the normal EIB project cycle and governance.

My Department has no direct role in applying for, or securing, funding from EFSI for SMEs or commercial enterprises operating in Ireland.

EFSI has two specific windows: the SME Window and the Infrastructure & Innovation Win-

dow. The latter is managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) whilst the former is managed by the European Investment Fund (EIF), through financial intermediaries. Each Window has a ring-fenced budget.

Under the SME Window, SMEs and mid-caps seeking loans and equity capital under EFSI must contact EIF-approved financial intermediaries directly.

Such financial intermediaries are Financial, Credit & Guarantee Institutions, and Loan Funds established and operating in one or more of the EU Member States duly authorised to carry out lending/leasing activities to SMEs and Small Mid-Caps, as well as Fund management companies targeting SMEs and Small Mid-Caps. They apply to the EIF to become approved financial intermediaries and to secure EFSI financing, deployed through EIF.

Under the Infrastructure & Innovation Window, large corporates, special purpose vehicles or Midcap companies (with up to 3,000 employees) can apply directly to the EIB for project loans or loans to finance research and innovation. These loans have a minimum size of €25 million. Such projects undergo the standard EIB due diligence process, in order to verify their eligibility for EIB financing and for EFSI backing.

The EIB provides a partial list of approved projects with companies in Ireland on the following webpage:

<http://www.eib.org/efsi/efsi-projects/index?c=IE>

Note that details of projects that are commercially sensitive may be withheld by the EIB.

Brexit Issues

49. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the tools being developed for firms with an exposure to the UK market in line with state aid rules; and if tools are being developed to cater for increased flexibility on state aid rules. [38316/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require to address challenges arising as a result of the Brexit Referendum, which is likely to represent a structural shift in the UK trading relations. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

My Department has been working with the Department of Finance, EI, SBCI and Department of Agriculture to develop potential supports to respond to the needs of businesses impacted by Brexit. In particular work is progressing on the development of a proposed Brexit related Working Capital Guarantee Scheme and also scoping out the need for a longer term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in investing for a post-Brexit environment. Development of these proposed responses is subject to resources being agreed as part of the annual budgetary process.

My Department's agencies are continuing to actively supporting companies to prepare for Brexit using a number of different tools. Some examples include:

- Enterprise Ireland's (EI) #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign featuring the 'Brexit SME Scorecard' was launched in March. The Scorecard is an interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six

business pillars. EI also ran a series of events featuring expert speakers throughout the country to encourage companies to prepare for Brexit.

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

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

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

A lot that can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. We are confident that the measures currently in development will be State Aid compliant, and we are taking steps to ensure that we can use all options available under the State aid framework to provide support to companies impacted by Brexit.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance this with the EU Commission.

Departmental Functions

50. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding the transfer of labour affairs functions in her Department to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; and the impact on legislative Bills already drafted in this area. [38317/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The transfer of functions in question came into effect on 1 September 2017 pursuant to the Labour Affairs and Labour Law (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017, S.I. No. 361 of 2017.

The employment policy and legislative functions listed beneath transferred from the former Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Work on relevant draft legislation will not be impacted as a result of the transfer of functions but will fall to be progressed by my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

At a national level:

- Lead on Employment Rights Policy and Legislation. This covers responsibility for eleven primary Acts governing employment rights in Ireland and related policy issues.

- Lead on the Low Pay Commission, established to make recommendations annually to the Minister on the appropriate level of the National Minimum wage and related areas.

- Lead on legislation in relation to the national minimum wage and related areas. This entails the transfer of Ministerial responsibility for the national minimum wage under the NMW Act 2000 and the Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015.

At EU/International level

- Lead role and co-ordination of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council.
- Lead responsibility for the Treaty based Employment Committee (EMCO) and the EU Semester process.
- Lead responsibility for Ireland's response and input on the EU Pillar of Social Rights.
- Lead responsibility for Ireland's engagement with Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.
- Lead responsibility for the Council of Europe Social Charter and co-ordination of responses on the Social Charter.

Departmental Staff Data

51. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual percentage of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies staff under the remit of her Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38356/17]

52. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the annual percentage of public service staff that were women under the remit of her department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38379/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51 and 52 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in tabular form, as requested.

Body	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	53%	53%	48%	52%	52%	50%	54%	54%
IAASA	46%	50%	54%	54%	54%	65%	65%	73%
IDA Ireland	57%	61%	65%	64%	62%	55%	56%	59%
NSAI	38%	39%	41%	41%	40%	39%	42%	42%
Enterprise Ireland	52%	54%	54%	54%	55%	54%	55%	57%
SFI	63%	66%	73%	70%	71%	71%	74%	70%
CCPC*	-	-	-	-	49%	48%	52%	53%
NCA	47%	42%	40%	57%	-	-	-	-
Competition Authority	40%	43%	36%	37%	-	-	-	-
H.S.A.**								53%

* The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) was established on 31 October 2014, as a result of the amalgamation of the National Consumer Agency (NCA) and

the Competition Authority.

** The HSA have been unable in the time available to gather all the information requested. When the totality of the information has been collated I will convey the information to Deputy McDonald.

In relation to my own Department the figures are:

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
59%	59%	60%	60%	60%	60%	60%	59%

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 31.

Brexit Staff

54. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff in the dedicated Brexit unit within her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38456/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division of my Department. Its main focus is to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by 1 Principal, 2 Assistant Principals, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. An additional staffing resource is currently being recruited to support the Brexit Unit.

Of course, the work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges across all its Divisions and actively keeps this under review. In this regard is intended to review the Department's workforce plan (2017-2019) as part of the Department's business planning processes for 2018 where the Brexit Agenda will be a priority.

Science Foundation Ireland

55. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the budget allocation of Science Foundation Ireland in each of the years 2007 to 2017, in tabular form. [38499/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The budget allocations from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to Science Foundation Ireland for the years 2007 – 2017 are set out in the following Table:

Year	Revised Estimates Volume allocation€000	Plus sanctioned Deferred Surrender (Capital Carryover) €000	Supplementary Estimate €000	Total annual allocation€000
2007	165,772	X	X	165,772
2008	183,643	2,226	X	185,869

2009	170,524	5,500	X	176,024
2010	159,833	X	X	159,833
2011	175,142	X	X	175,142
2012	169,669	X	X	169,669
2013	157,300	7,000	X	162,300
2014	153,840	9,000	X	162,840
2015	163,230	X	5,000	168,230
2016	166,662	X	27,000	193,662
2017	172,631	X		172,631

Capital carryover may be permitted from one financial year to the next and requires the formal approval of the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform each year. As is evidenced from the table above Science Foundation Ireland's allocations were enhanced in the years 2008, 2009, 2013 and 2014 with the provision of capital carryover amounts from unspent capital monies arising elsewhere on the Department's Vote.

In 2015 and 2016, additional capital monies were also provided to Science Foundation Ireland through the approved Supplementary Estimates by the Houses of the Oireachtas in those years.

Brexit Negotiations

56. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the detail of each specific EU Competitiveness Council Ministers meeting in which she or her predecessor made the case for the need of a revision of state aid rules to protect Irish enterprises and related jobs during the UK's two-year exit phase from the EU and subsequent transition phase; the date of each meeting in which this was raised, in tabular form; the progress made at EU level to increase state aid thresholds to support Irish enterprises from a hard Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38512/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Since the Brexit Referendum, my predecessor, Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor, attended three meetings of the Competitiveness Council on 29th September 2016, 28th November 2016 and 20th February 2017. State Aid rules did not feature on the agenda. However, in our engagements with both EU Commissioners and Ministers from other Member States since the UK decision, Brexit has been a central part of the discussions at these meetings. Last autumn, officials of my Department initiated discussions with DG Competition to sensitise the Commission to potential difficulties likely to be encountered by Irish firms from the Brexit referendum result. I also informed Michael Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, of these discussions when I met him in Brussels on 10th July 2017. These discussions continue at the highest levels to address all relevant issues relating to any proposals emerging from our work with industry.

The Government is conscious of the need to consider the types of supports that Irish businesses may require to address challenges arising as a result of the Brexit Referendum, which is likely to represent a structural shift in the UK trading relations. Short, medium and long term responses from market diversification through to price repositioning will be needed.

On foot of extensive engagement with industry, my Department is working with the Department of Finance, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Enterprise Ireland and the SBCI to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses. This work, along with market

developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

A lot that can be done within the existing EU State Aid Framework. We are confident that the measures currently in development will be State Aid compliant, and we are taking steps to ensure that we can use all options available under the State aid framework to provide support to companies impacted by Brexit.

Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing rules, we will move quickly to advance this with the EU Commission.

Brexit Staff

57. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of staff in the dedicated Brexit unit within her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38513/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by 1 Principal, 2 Assistant Principals, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. An additional staffing resource is currently being recruited to support the Brexit Unit.

Of course, the work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges across all its Divisions and actively keeps requirements in this regard under review. Additionally, it is intended to review the Department's workforce plan (2017-2019) as part of the Department's business planning processes for 2018 and naturally the demands attendant on servicing the Brexit agenda will continue to be a priority.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 7.

Third Level Institutions

59. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the decision by University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology to withdraw staffing and funding from the Irish marine and energy research cluster IMERC in Ringaskiddy, County Cork (details supplied); and the future of the research facility, in view of this withdrawal by same. [38530/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am aware of the decision by University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology to withdraw staff and funding from the Irish Maritime and Energy Research Cluster (IMERC) and to effectively dissolve the tripartite alliance with the Irish Naval Service. However, neither my Department, nor my agencies, were consulted on this decision either in advance of it being announced, or subsequently.

My Department has policy responsibility for the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) and my officials have verified that no funding was paid to IMERC from this

programme. The PRTL Cycle 5 project ERI@MErC (Maritime and Energy Research Campus and Commercial Cluster), also known as the Beaufort Building, is unaffected by this decision.

While the consultants did have brief, informal phone contact with representatives of my agencies during the conduct of the review, neither my department nor my agencies were consulted on the findings or the recommendations either prior to the completion of the report or subsequently.

My department is committed to supporting research and innovation in the marine sector in order to exploit the potential for enterprise development and job creation in the sector.

To this end in 2013 my department, through Science Foundation Ireland, established MaREI, the Marine and Renewable Energy research, development and Innovation Centre. This represents an investment of over €30 million with €18.9 million of SFI funding, combined with over €10.5 million in contributions from the 45 industry partners.

MaREI is located in UCC and the research team comprises internationally recognised experts from UCC, NUIG, UL, MU, UCD, and CIT, who have complementary research backgrounds key to providing the underpinning research necessary for Ireland to develop commercially successful marine and renewable energy industries.

A further demonstration of my department's engagement with the sector is that Enterprise Ireland, in conjunction with the Irish Maritime Development Office, launched the Irish Marine Industry Network in 2016. The marine sector is both diverse and diffuse and the purpose of the Network is to increase the cohesion of the sector, to provide a visible identity and forum to increase collaboration. It will also provide a "one-stop-shop" for showcasing our national capability in the sector.

In addition, following on from the Harnessing our Ocean Wealth strategy, Enterprise Ireland has a current open call for the provision of Marine Incubator facilities. There have been a number of applicants but the outcome from this process is not yet concluded.

Scientific Research

60. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to travel to CERN in Switzerland; and if she has given consideration to the State becoming a member of CERN. [38532/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Innovation 2020, the national strategy for research and innovation, recognises that in order for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader, our research and innovation system must be open with strong international collaboration links. Membership of leading International Research Organisations is an important mechanism for facilitating this engagement. For this reason, the Government gave a specific commitment in Innovation 2020 to initiate negotiations with CERN on Ireland's membership options.

Discussions with CERN commenced in 2016 and senior officials from my department, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland visited CERN in Geneva in July 2016. The Director-General of CERN, Dr Fabiola Gianotti, visited Dublin in October 2016 and met with the former Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. The information gathered during these engagements has provided my officials with a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits of membership of CERN. While these benefits are significant, the cost of membership is also significant. Therefore, the case for membership of

CERN is being assessed in the context of other investment priorities.

The case for membership of CERN is being considered in the context of the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, which covers the period 2018-2021. The Mid-Term Review will be completed before the end of 2017 at which point I will be in a position to make a recommendation regarding Ireland's membership of CERN.

In view of the visit by my officials to CERN and the visit of the Director-General to Dublin, I have no plans to visit CERN in Geneva prior to the completion of the Review process.

Scientific Research

61. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs that have been created as a result of the State's membership of the European Space Agency, ESA; the amount allocated to the ESA for membership since 2012; the number of visits made by her or Ministers of State; the travel costs associated with same; the number of officials that have travelled to facilities operated under the remit of the ESA in 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [38533/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Ireland is a member of the European Space Agency (ESA) since 1975. Since joining, Ireland has used ESA programmes to develop an industrial sector in space technologies and equipment for the European and global space market.

ESA provides the sole means of providing critical space technology development and qualification to enable Irish industry access to the global space market. Unlike their international competitors, Irish companies do not have access to national space development or procurement programmes and without ESA support would be at a major disadvantage to their international competitors.

The Irish Government's investment in the space sector is generating significant economic impact, particularly in terms of jobs, exports and new company formation. The number of Irish companies active in space related activities has grown by 100% from 30 to 60 in the period 2010 to 2016. These companies employed 2,000 people in Ireland in 2016 and employment is expected to grow to over 5,000 by 2020.

Ireland's contributions to ESA are set out in the following table.

Year	Investment in ESA (€'000)
2012	14,779
2013	17,279
2014	17,279
2015	17,279
2016	19,279
2017	17,779

In the period 2015 to date, there has been one visit to an ESA operated facility by a Minister or Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI). On 24 April 2017, John Halligan TD, Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development led an Enterprise Ireland trade visit to ESTEC, the European Space Research and Technology Centre in the Netherlands. The Minister was accompanied on the visit by ten Enterprise Ireland client companies, three of which announced contracts totalling almost €2 million with ESA on the day.

In December 2016, ESA hosted their Ministerial Council in Lucerne, Switzerland. Minister Halligan represented Ireland at Council, where multiannual budgets were agreed and decisions were made on a range of policy and programmes covering the period to 2020.

The Minister's expenses for both visits are set out in the following table.

Date	Purpose of Travel	Travel Details	Amount Paid	Total
December 2016	ESA Ministerial Council in Lucerne, Switzerland	Return Flights Hotel Other Expenses	€300.98 €544.00 €85.44	€930.42
April 2017	Enterprise Ireland trade visit to ES-TEC, Netherlands	Return Flights Hotel Expenses	€128.98 €99.50 €206.06	€434.54

The only other State visit to an ESA facility in the period 2015 to 2017 occurred in January 2016 when An Taoiseach led a delegation to ESTEC. Enterprise Ireland Chief Executive, Julie Sinnamon and officials from DBEI and Enterprise Ireland also took part in the trade mission. During the visit, Enterprise Ireland signed an agreement with the ESA to develop a Space Business Incubation Centre in Ireland (ESA BIC Ireland), which is now established and has already seen two companies benefit from this agreement.

In addition to formal State visits, Ireland's space policy interests in the European Space Agency are advanced through various ESA committees and programme boards by two officials from DBEI, with support from three Enterprise Ireland officials who advise on technical and scientific matters. The meetings are primarily held at ESA's headquarters in Paris.

Retail Sector

62. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures she plans to implement to assist the retail sector due to the difficulties that have arisen from the weakening of the value of sterling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38596/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Retail Consultation Forum was established by my Department in 2014 as a response to the challenges experienced by the sector during the recession. The Forum provides a platform for structured engagement between the retail sector and Government to identify practical actions which could be taken by Government, or by industry itself, to support sustainable growth, in particular employment growth, in the sector. Membership includes the main retail representative bodies, retailers themselves and representatives from relevant Government Departments and public bodies.

One of the most immediate concerns facing the Sector is the impact of Brexit and how this might influence exchange rates and consumer sentiment in the short term and impact matters such as customs, logistics and supply chains in the longer terms.

In recognition of these matters, Brexit has become a standing item on the agenda for discussion at meetings of the Retail Consultation Forum. My Department has also ensured that Retail representative bodies have been included in stakeholder engagements on the impact of Brexit and in a pilot study into the firm-level impact for enterprise of Brexit, to ensure that the impact of Brexit on the sector is understood. The retail sector also has access to supports such as the Enterprise Ireland Brexit SME Scorecard to assist with planning and preparation for Brexit.

A number of initiatives from the Retail Consultation Forum, my Department and other Gov-

ernment Departments will strengthen the capability and resilience of the retail sector to meet the challenges resulting from Brexit, including:

- Building digital capability to increase the competitiveness of the retail sector in an increasingly digital world through addressing digital skills gaps and supporting retailers to trade on line through initiatives such as the Trading Online Voucher scheme.

- Addressing the demise of the high street in towns and villages around the country with the launch in April 2017 of “A Framework for Town Centre Renewal”. The Framework includes a step- by-step Town Action Plan for key stakeholders and will support the “Town and Village Renewal” scheme launched earlier this year;

- Addressing energy, waste and water costs with the development, in consultation with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, of a pilot Retail programme to reduce such costs and consumption.

Engagement with the retail sector will continue through the Retail Consultation Forum, bi-lateral engagements with representatives of the sector and Brexit-focused stakeholder engagement.

Retail Sector

63. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps her Department is taking to assist retailers to deal with the impact in the fall in value of sterling; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38613/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Retail Consultation Forum was established by my Department in 2014 as a response to the challenges experienced by the sector during the recession. The Forum provides a platform for structured engagement between the retail sector and Government to identify practical actions which could be taken by Government, or by industry itself, to support sustainable growth, in particular employment growth, in the sector. Membership includes the main retail representative bodies, retailers themselves and representatives from relevant Government Departments and public bodies.

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A number of initiatives from the Retail Consultation Forum, my Department and other Government Departments will strengthen the capability and resilience of the retail sector to meet the challenges resulting from Brexit, including:

- Building digital capability to increase the competitiveness of the retail sector in an increasingly digital world through addressing digital skills gaps and supporting retailers to trade on line through initiatives such as the Trading Online Voucher scheme.

- Addressing the demise of the high street in towns and villages around the country with the launch in April 2017 of “A Framework for Town Centre Renewal”. The Framework includes a step- by-step Town Action Plan for key stakeholders and will support the “Town and Village Renewal” scheme launched earlier this year;

-Addressing energy, waste and water costs with the development, in consultation with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, of a pilot Retail programme to reduce such costs and consumption.

Engagement with the retail sector will continue through the Retail Consultation Forum, bilateral engagements with representatives of the sector and Brexit-focused stakeholder engagement.

Retail Sector

64. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to ensure consumers benefit from the fall in the value of sterling in Irish branches of UK retailers to mitigate a potential increase in cross border shopping; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38616/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to underline the Government’s commitment to ensuring that benefits of a stronger Euro are passed on to Irish consumers. My Department has engaged with the retail sector through the Retail Consultation Forum in relation to this issue when the euro has been strong against sterling. In response, retailers have explained that some of the differentials between prices quoted in Euro and Sterling may be attributed to such factors as the exchange rates at the time of the purchases by the retailers, the relative costs of doing business between the two jurisdictions and tax rates.

I understand that the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has not received any consumer complaints on this issue in the past few months. While it is not my function to fix prices for retailers, it is my view that retailers should explain to their customers and to the economies in which they operate, why there are such price differentials between the two currency areas. Actions by retailers to restore consumers’ confidence that they can get a fair deal will help not only to address issues around the differentials in prices but will also help in assisting businesses to retain trade and, thereby, help to maintain employment.

I recognise that one of the most immediate concerns facing the retail sector is the impact of Brexit and how this might influence exchange rates and consumer sentiment in the short term and impact matters such as customs, logistics and supply chains in the longer terms.

In recognition of these matters, Brexit has become a standing item on the agenda for discussion at meetings of the Retail Consultation Forum which was set up in 2014 to provide a platform for structured engagement between the retail sector and Government to address challenges and to support sustainable growth, in particular employment growth, in the sector.

My Department has also ensured that Retail representative bodies have been included in stakeholder engagements on the impact of Brexit and in a pilot study into the firm-level impact for enterprise of Brexit, to ensure that the impact of Brexit on the sector is understood. The retail sector also has access to supports such as the Enterprise Ireland Brexit SME Scorecard to assist with planning and preparation for Brexit.

A number of initiatives from the Retail Consultation Forum, my Department and other Gov-

ernment Departments will strengthen the capability and resilience of the retail sector to meet the challenges resulting from Brexit, including:

- Building digital capability to increase the competitiveness of the retail sector in an increasingly digital world through addressing digital skills gaps and supporting retailers to trade on line through initiatives such as the Trading Online Voucher scheme.

- Addressing the demise of the high street in towns and villages around the country with the launch in April 2017 of “A Framework for Town Centre Renewal”. The Framework includes a step- by-step Town Action Plan for key stakeholders and will support the “Town and Village Renewal” scheme launched earlier this year;

- Addressing energy, waste and water costs with the development, in consultation with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, of a pilot Retail programme to reduce such costs and consumption.

Engagement with the retail sector will continue through the Retail Consultation Forum, bi-lateral engagements with representatives of the sector and Brexit-focused stakeholder engagement.

Brexit Issues

65. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the specific measures her Department has taken to assist InterTradeIreland in the wake of the Brexit referendum result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38658/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): InterTrade Ireland (ITI), given its experience in promoting and strengthening North-South trade, is especially well-positioned to assist businesses in Ireland address the particular commercial challenges that Brexit may present for cross-border commerce. That is why the Government provided €250,000 in additional funding to ITI this year to allow it to undertake a range of initiatives aimed at better preparing Irish SMEs for the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union. This included the introduction of a Brexit readiness voucher scheme, strengthening the body’s capacity to deliver expert advice and a series of events focused on building awareness amongst SMEs of Brexit-related challenges. The extra financial resources provided brought my Department’s total funding of ITI to €7.9 million in 2017.

Funding was also provided by the Government to ITI so that an important Brexit research project could be undertaken for the body by the Economic and Social Research Institute. That project, once fully completed, will improve our understanding of the impact on North-South trade of different trade and tariff regimes that could potentially result on account of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. It will also provide key data on the extent and concentration of cross border commerce, including information on trade in services. The first phase of this study, relating to the potential impact of World Trade Organisation tariffs, was completed earlier this year and was published in June.

Brexit Issues

66. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the measures undertaken by her Department to help businesses diversify their export markets as a consequence of Brexit; the number of firms that have availed of these spe-

cific measures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38659/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The UK is a strategically important market for Irish-owned companies and some sectors, for example Food, Timber, Construction and Engineering are particularly dependent on that market.

However, the objective is not to reduce our exports to the UK market, which will always be a key market. The aim is to grow our exports to other markets. A particular focus will be the Eurozone market.

In terms of export assistance, my Department secured additional resources in Budget 2017 to enable EI and the LEOs to support exporting companies. An extra 39 staff are being recruited by EI to support companies with market research and new market penetration. EI will organise some 145 trade promotion events in 2017.

Since the UK referendum result, my Department and its agencies - Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices and Inter Trade Ireland - have been actively engaged in supporting companies to assess and address their exposure to Brexit.

In addition to the market diversification drive characterised by the new Eurozone Strategy, Enterprise Ireland's focus continues to be on supporting companies on a one to one and on a sector by sector basis to enhance their competitiveness and capability and build on their success in existing and new markets. In March 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched its 'Brexit SME Scorecard', a new interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars where they have not already done so. Based on answers supplied by the user, the Scorecard generates an immediate report which contains suggested actions and resources, and information on events for companies to attend, to prepare for Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland has also launched a Be Prepared Grant that supports the costs of SME clients in preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit. It can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and out of pocket expenses associated with researching the direction of their Brexit action plan. These supports are available on EI's website: www.enterprise-ireland.com.

In May 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched a new Eurozone Strategy to assist Irish exporters increase exports in Eurozone countries by 50%, from €4bn currently to €6bn, by 2020. This strategy will be accompanied by a new 'Irish Advantage' campaign which will target Eurozone buyers to promote Irish innovation in key Brexit impacted sectors.

Eurozone markets can provide currency stability, proximity and potential for growth and opportunities for Irish companies. Enterprise Ireland's Eurozone Strategy will see the agency partnering with some 600 client companies, approximately half of which are 'Eurozone Start' (relatively new to the market and who are heavily reliant on the UK) while the remainder are 'Eurozone Scale' (already exporting to the Eurozone).

To communicate Enterprise Ireland's Eurozone Strategy and the supports available as part of the implementation of the agency's strategy, a Prepare for Brexit Breakfast Roadshows was rolled nationally to engage with companies.

Each of the 31 Local Enterprise Offices can offer advice, training and mentoring to address Brexit challenges. Each LEO can now offer financial assistance to clients to examine export options, to improve product innovation and improve the competitiveness of their business in the face of Brexit.

InterTrade Ireland has established a new Brexit Advisory Service to assist SMEs, particularly dependent on cross border trade.

On the critical issue of finance, following significant analysis and stakeholder consultation, my Department is currently working to develop appropriate, tailored and targeted responses to meet the needs of companies across the economy around working capital and business development schemes. While these measures are being considered in the context of existing State aid rules, this work, along with market developments as a result of Brexit, and ongoing engagement with the business community, will inform further discussions with the Commission and the development of any further initiatives to business.

Brexit Issues

67. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit; the publication date of these plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38687/17]

68. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38703/17]

69. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including threats and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38719/17]

70. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the scenario planning that has been conducted by her Department for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38735/17]

71. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38751/17]

72. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38767/17]

73. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38799/17]

75. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38831/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 to 73, inclusive, and 75 together.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach" published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

Given the wide mission of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the UK's decision to leave the European Union will impact significantly on all policy fields across my Department as well as our family of Agencies. My Department and the enterprise agencies are fully committed to supporting business and all of our stakeholders in this period of heightened uncertainty.

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

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

My Department has funded a research project commissioned by InterTrade Ireland to improve our understanding of the impact on cross border trade of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit. The research, conducted by ESRI, which was published in June, provides useful data on the extent and concentration of cross border trade, including information on this trade by product and firm types and barriers to trade.

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

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission is also undertaking a research project to identify the potential financial impacts of Brexit on Irish consumers due to price increases on goods imported from the UK, under a number of potential post Brexit trade scenarios.

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

Brexit and the changing global trading environment were significant considerations in drawing up the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs. This year’s plan is at the core of the government’s response to the huge challenge these pose for businesses - to make sure our enterprise base is resilient in the face of changes to come. This was reflected in the 10 percent increase secured by my Department in this year’s capital allocation. Finally, we will also, in the context of Budget 2018, seek to secure the necessary additional resources required to put in place more supports for companies most impacted by Brexit.

In recognition of the challenges facing the Department, not least those posed by Brexit, the Department’s exchequer gross allocation in 2017 was increased to €858.5m. This increase, which represented an overall increase of 7% on the Department’s 2016 allocation of €800.4m, included an additional €52m in capital funding and an additional €6m in current funding.

In terms of current funding, the increased allocation provided to my Department in 2017 included an additional €3million in respect of Pay and is being targeted specifically to assist in our response to the evolving Brexit scenario. It is enabling the Department and, primarily, our Agencies to recruit some 40 to 50 additional staff to supplement existing staffing numbers. These numbers may grow as Agencies allocate additional Own Resource Income, by agreement with the Department, to recruit further staff to work on “Brexit-related” activity.

As regards capital funding, the 2017 allocation of €555m is a 10% increase on the Department’s 2016 capital base of €503m and represents the highest ever capital allocation secured by my Department. This increased capital provision is intended to ensure that the Department’s Enterprises Agencies can continue to meet the ongoing challenges of enterprise development but also the specific threats and opportunities posed by Brexit.

As advised Brexit continues to be primary focus and priority for my Department. The Deputy will be aware that preparations in relation to the formulation of Budget 2018 are well underway. It is my intention that the Brexit challenge is to the forefront of the Budget 2018 discussions. Given the available fiscal parameters, I am determined to secure the optimal level of funding for my Department’s Enterprise Agencies in Budget 2018 and beyond given their central role in responding to the threats posed by Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs are steadily working with companies to make sure that they

are better prepared to respond to the challenges that Brexit will bring. These are the medium term, strategic actions that I know that companies are calling for – things like helping them to drive down costs, diversify into new markets and innovate in the way they do business.

Enterprise Ireland is guiding its clients on issues including: the implications of trading with the UK, improving competitiveness, reducing supply chain costs, accessing funding, finance, foreign exchange, employment regulations and legal issues; investing in programmes to ensure that clients have the finances, the innovation, the leadership and the scale so as to grow in international markets; intensifying its strategy of supporting clients to diversify into new markets and is hosting an International Markets week in the first week of October in Ireland, to provide Irish exporters with access to its overseas market advisors; Enterprise Ireland's UK team, based in London, is providing support to clients to help identify key business opportunities in the short and medium terms. They also provide advice and support on responding to the implications such as improving competitiveness and reducing supply chain costs.

Enterprise Ireland has also extended its schedule of Minister-led Trade missions. In 2017, there are 46 international ministerial led trade events planned with focus on market diversification into Eurozone and North America. The 2017 trade mission schedule targets key sectors in high potential growth markets and aims to open doors for Irish companies to create opportunities to start negotiations and win significant business contracts in overseas markets. IDA Ireland is constantly engaged with clients across its entire portfolio and in the months leading up to the UK referendum it engaged with clients and prospective clients in relation to the potential impact of BREXIT. The IDA has a Team involved in strategic scenario planning, which continues to work on ensuring that the Agency's strategy is fit for purpose in light of the referendum results in the UK.

IDA client companies now directly support over 199,000 jobs in Ireland – the highest level ever.

IDA Ireland will continue to work with its existing client base to assist and support them in their growth and expansion in Ireland; to highlight Ireland's continued strong offering based on talent, ease of doing business, its competitive and transparent taxation regime, English as the spoken language and critically Ireland's continued access to the EU market; and to be in contact with clients, and prospective clients across the globe and continue to market a competitive value proposition to attract mobile foreign investment from global locations including the UK.

InterTrade Ireland provides a targeted portfolio of programmes to help businesses, especially SMEs, develop capacity in the areas of science, technology & innovation and sales & marketing.

In May InterTrade Ireland established a Brexit Advisory Service for SMEs in the Republic of Ireland who are trading with Northern Ireland, to help them adapt to the changed circumstances following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This initiative offers businesses a number of supports, including vouchers valued at €1,000 allowing them to fund specialist advice, free briefing events, information on currency hedging and an interactive information tool explaining the technical language related to Brexit.

The body is also monitoring business needs and challenges through its Business Monitor survey process (a quarterly survey of SME opinion and plans), so that it is in a position to respond quickly to business concerns as the Brexit process evolves.

In addition, Science Foundation Ireland is undertaking a range of measures, both immediate and over the longer term. A key objective for SFI is to strengthen the research funding collaborations with the UK and Northern Ireland with the aim of supporting current collaborations

and ensuring that the Irish research community are well-positioned for the post Brexit scenario, where Britain will continue to be a world-leader for innovation and R&D. Given this platform of strong collaboration, or geographical proximity, common language and numerous shared values, SFI believes that it is strategically important now to consolidate and build more Ireland-UK research partnerships and in so doing harness our mutually beneficial strengths.

SFI is targeting globally-renowned researchers to relocate their research operations to Irish universities, thereby benefiting Ireland but also offering these researchers certain access to EU funding. This can take the form of either internationally-based researchers co-locating to Ireland and the UK and holding a joint-professorship appointment with an Irish university and a top-4 UK university, or can involve a UK-based researcher re-locating all or part of their research operation to Ireland.

SFI continues to work to maximise the opportunities arising from Brexit and to moderate any possible negative consequences of Brexit on the Irish research community.

Brexit Staff

74. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of vacancies in her Department for Brexit-related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38815/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Within my Department a dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet Committee dealing with Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by 1 Principal, 2 Assistant Principals, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. An additional staffing resource at Higher Executive Officer/Administrative Officer is currently being recruited to augment this team. It is hoped that the vacancy will be filled within the next 6 weeks.

Of course, the work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges across all its Divisions and actively keeps this under review. In this regard is intended to review the Department's workforce plan (2017-2019) as part of the Department's business planning processes for 2018.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 67.

Departmental Bodies Data

76. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with her Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38847/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am keen that the Department continues to engage in in-depth and frequent dialogue with our stakeholders on a range of policy areas which fall within our remit. My Department established a Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation 'Enterprise Forum' which provides a vehicle for discussion of enterprise, trade and investment policy implications

arising from wider global challenges, with a specific focus on Brexit in the first instance. The focus of the working group in the first phase of its establishment will be the UK's exit from the EU - discussions at the group will help inform the development of policy and operational positions in relation to enterprise, trade and investment.

The role of the DBEI Enterprise Forum on Brexit & Global Challenges is to gather intelligence from the enterprise sector, and consider the implications and impacts for enterprise emerging from the UK's exit from the EU across the full spectrum of DJEI's policy remit including but not limited to, impacts on enterprise, employment, trade, investment and regulation; assist in identifying measures which could be considered by Government, Agencies and business to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities associated with Brexit; share research on the potential impacts of Brexit on enterprise; and identify policy approaches which could inform negotiations.

Membership of the Forum includes business representative bodies, representatives from DJEI Agencies and policy officials from across DJEI.

DJEI	Agencies	Business Rep Groups
Dr Orlaigh Quinn Secretary General (chair) Philip Kelly, Assistant Secretary, EU Affairs, Trade Policy, Safety & Health Policy Division Declan Hughes, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Enterprise Development Division Dermot Mulligan, Assistant Secretary, Innovation & Investment Division Assistant Secretary, Strategic Policy Division Lorraine Benson, Trade Policy Pauline Mulligan, Brexit Unit	Julie Sinnamon, Chief Executive, Enterprise Ireland Martin Shanahan, Chief Executive, IDA Ireland Mark Ferguson, Director General, Science Foundation Ireland	Pat Ivory, Director of EU and International Affairs, Ibec Arnold Dillon, Brexit Lead, Ibec Linda Barry, Acting Director, Small Firms Association Marc Coleman, Director, Financial Services Ireland Paul Kelly, Director of Food & Drink Industry Ireland Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, ISME Mark Redmond, Chief Executive, American Chambers Oliver O'Connor, Chief Executive, Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association Simon McKeever, Chief Executive, Irish Exporters Association Ian Talbot, Chambers Ireland Thomas Burke, Director, Retail Ireland David Fitzsimons, Chief Executive, Retail Excellence Ireland Tara Buckley, Director General, RGD Data

My Department convenes quarterly meetings of the Retail Consultation Forum to hear the sectors concerns and to work together on finding practical solutions to the key issues faced by the sector. Brexit has been placed as a standing item on the agenda of the Retail Forum. Brexit is also a regular item for discussion at the Regional Action Plan for Jobs implementation Committees.

Furthermore, my Department held a large stakeholder engagement event in Carrick-on-Shannon on 30 January to hear the views of a wide range of stakeholders. At this event, the

Government's ongoing response to Brexit and the impact across the policy areas for the Department was outlined. I co-hosted, with Minister Bruton, a second stakeholder engagement on 3 July 2017 which focused on the theme of "Enterprise Skills Needs and Brexit". This event provided a valuable opportunity for dialogue with all relevant stakeholders to highlight activity already underway or planned to deal with the skills challenges posed by Brexit and to identify any issues which may need further discussion or study through the national skills architecture. A further joint stakeholder dialogue on research with the Department of Education and Skills is also being planned.

In addition to this more structured engagement with enterprise, I, and senior officials from my department, meet with enterprise and enterprise representative groups on a regular basis to ensure that industry has input into enterprise and employment policy development and I am keen that the Department continues to engage in in-depth and frequent dialogue with our stakeholders on a range of policy areas which fall within our remit.

Brexit Issues

77. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by her Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38879/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My department is conducting a number of research projects to build an understanding of the possible implications of Brexit on Ireland for enterprise, consumers and trading relations. These studies will provide an evidence base to inform Ireland's policy positions as part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU. The details of the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by my Department is as follows:

Title	Summary	Date commenced	Expected date of completion	Expected date of publication
Sectoral implications arising from Brexit: Most exposed sectors	This research examines the firm level implications of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union for Ireland's most exposed enterprise sectors.	December 2016	End 2017	N/A*

Title	Summary	Date commenced	Expected date of completion	Expected date of publication
Strategic Implications arising from EU-UK Trading Patterns	Profile trade and investment to highlight dependence at sectoral and product level Quantify impact of various scenarios on trade and investment Develop policy options for Ireland – negotiations and enterprise (mitigation) policies Profile other EU countries to identify interests and allies	June 2017	End 2017	N/A*
**The Potential Impact of WTO Tariffs and other key relevant issues on Cross-Border Trade	The first topic in the research programme examined scenarios on how trade flows between Ireland and Northern Ireland might be affected in the event of the imposition of WTO-level tariffs and other non-tariff barriers on cross-border trade in manufactured products. That report was published earlier this Summer. Two remaining phases will be carried out - The second phase will assess some important aspects of how this cross-border trade is structured at a firm level and how flexible firms are in the face of trade shocks. It will also look at the integration of supply chains. The third phase will look at wider ecosystem trade issues and will assess trends and developments relevant to trade in Services (as opposed to manufactured products), between both jurisdictions.	Phase 2. -August 2017 Phase 3 -November 2017	Phase 2. - Oct/Nov. 2017 Phase 3 -Spring 2018	Phase 2. - Oct/Nov. 2017 Phase 3 - Spring 2018

Title	Summary	Date commenced	Expected date of completion	Expected date of publication
***Financial impact of Brexit on consumers in Ireland	Analysis of impacts on Irish consumers due to price increases on UK imports under a number of potential post Brexit trade scenarios	August 2017	End 2017	End 2017

* It is not intended to publish this study as it will be part of the deliberative process to inform the development of our policy positions as part of the negotiations on the UK future relationship with the EU.

** Project being carried out by InterTrade Ireland in consultation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

*** Project being carried out by the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission in consultation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

Departmental Expenditure

78. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38895/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The 2018 expenditure ceilings for the Capital and Current allocations to be provided to my Department's Vote next year will be determined through the forthcoming "Budget 2018" and Revised Estimates Volume 2018 processes.

The 2018 Revised Estimates Volume, with the various expenditure allocations and ceilings set across all Departments, is likely to be published in early December 2017 by my colleague, the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform.

Vehicle Registration

79. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance if a feasibility study has been carried out on the introduction of personalised number plates based on the UK model; if this is an income avenue his Department will consider; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36793/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the Finance Act 1992 Revenue has responsibility for vehicle identification marks (registration numbers) in the State and the registration format is prescribed in Statutory Instrument No. 318 of 1992, Vehicle Registration and Taxation Regulations (as amended).

There is provision that Revenue may assign to a vehicle a registration number reserved by the owner on payment of a fee of €1,000, but this registration number must comply with the format prescribed in S.I. No. 318 of 1992. In 2016, a total of 237 numbers were reserved with associated fees of €237,000. To date in 2017, a total of 217 numbers have been reserved with

associated fees of €217,000. Apart from this facility to reserve a registration number, there is no scope within the current legislation to provide for a personalised number scheme. This issue has been raised a number of times over the years but the systems developments required, including registration plate recognition systems, would be likely to far outweigh the potential benefits to the exchequer given the comparatively small national car population.

I am informed by Revenue that it has no plans to provide for personalised registration numbers.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

80. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance the status of an appeal for a primary medical certificate by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36803/17]

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

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy one of the following conditions: be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs; be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs; be without both hands or without both arms; be without one or both legs; be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg; have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

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

The Regulations mandate that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations. I would advise the individual concerned to contact the DDMBA directly to ascertain the status of their appeal.

Budget Submissions

81. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of proposals by an organisation (details supplied). [36846/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Each year, my Department receives a large number of such submissions from a wide range of groups and individuals. These are considered by the relevant officials in the context of the Budget process. However, the Deputy will

be aware that it is not the practice of the Minister for Finance to discuss the details of measures which may or may not be under consideration as part of the Budget and Finance Bill.

The Deputy may also wish to note that the services of my Department are offered, on a confidential basis, to cost tax policy and other proposals for political parties. Guidelines recently issued as to the operation of this facility for Budget 2018.

Currency Exchange

82. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider the future costs of the exchange rates on UK pensions being paid to Irish citizens living here and the taxation of Irish State pensions with a view to providing pension protection relative to the exchange rate; his plans to exempt those on lower pensions from paying tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37348/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following clarification with the Deputy's office, I understand that his question relates to a proposal to reduce the Irish tax payable by individuals with an Irish state pension who also have UK pension income, due to the negative impact of movements in the UK exchange rate on the Euro value of the UK pension income received.

I am advised by Revenue that the taxation of an Irish resident individual in receipt of a foreign pension depends on the type of pension being received.

In general, foreign pensions, including United Kingdom pensions, are taxable sources of income in Ireland. They are liable to Income Tax and Universal Social Charge but not Pay Related Social Insurance. Income Tax and Universal Social Charge on foreign pensions are charged at the same rates as other income and taxpayers are entitled to the same reliefs and credits.

Some foreign pensions are not taxable in Ireland. These are foreign occupational and social security pensions that would not be taxable if the recipient was resident in the country that granted the pension. Under the provisions of Section 200 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 this type of pension should be excluded for all the purposes of the Irish Income Tax Acts whether the recipient is resident in Ireland or otherwise.

Where a taxpayer is in receipt of income in a foreign currency, it is the Euro value of the income which is subject to tax. Accordingly, when a currency strengthens against the Euro, the amount subject to tax in Ireland may increase, and when a currency weakens against the Euro, the value decreases.

Were a tax relief to be introduced for individuals suffering a decrease in the Euro value of their income due to currency fluctuations, this would imply that a corresponding withdrawal of tax relief should occur where an individual benefits from an increase in the Euro value of their income due to currency fluctuations.

I do not consider that it would be appropriate to introduce a tax relief for one cohort of pensioners purely on the basis that some part of their income is derived from UK sources, where that relief would not be available to pensioners with the same level of income derived from Irish-only sources.

Tax Code

83. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the proposals being put forward by the working group established to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords; if these proposals have been submitted to him for consideration in the context of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38204/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A working group to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers) was established in January 2017 and chaired by my Department. This was on foot of a commitment contained in the ‘Strategy for the Rental Sector’, published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in December 2016. As part of its work, the Group conducted a public consultation over four weeks from Friday 10 March to Friday 7 April 2017. A preliminary output of the Working Group was presented in a Budget 2018 Tax Strategy Group (TSG) Paper and discussed at the meeting of the TSG which was held at the Department of Finance on 25 July 2017. The paper is available at the link: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/TSG-17-03-Tax-and-Fiscal-Treatment-of-Landlords-JC.pdf>. The Final Report of the Working Group will inform my consideration of any potential measures relating to the tax treatment of rental accommodation providers as part of my deliberations for Budget 2018. It is envisaged that the Final Report of the Working Group will be published on the Budget website (www.budget.gov.ie) on Budget Day.

Budget Submissions

84. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the estimated cost to the Exchequer of a proposal by an organisation (details supplied). [38295/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that my predecessor announced in Budget 2017 the Government’s intention to introduce a new, SME focused share-based remuneration incentive in Budget 2018. This is a complex undertaking as a focused scheme of this nature needs to comply with State Aid regulations and therefore requires EU approval. The intention of this incentive is to support SMEs in Ireland in their efforts to recruit and retain key employees. Work on the development of the incentive has been ongoing throughout the year, and it remains my intention to announce the details of this scheme in Budget 2018.

Exports Growth

85. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the export finance initiative. [38315/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Action 55 of the Action Plan for Jobs called for the roll out of an Export Finance Initiative to support export orientated SMEs in order to determine the demand from SMEs for export finance. A cross-departmental working group was put in place to develop this initiative. The Export Finance Working Group developed a product aimed at providing short-term working capital support for Irish exporting SMEs that was due to be rolled out by end Q2. Following a request from the Cabinet Committee on the Economy, Trade and Jobs in February 2017 for proposals to assist SMEs with the challenges posed by Brexit, a decision was made to refocus and broaden the work done by the Export Finance Working Group to look at SMEs affected by Brexit. The work undertaken as part of the Export Finance Initiative is now being used to support the development of Brexit mitigation measures; it is anticipated that exporters will be amongst those most impacted. It is important

that resources are appropriately allocated to policy measures in light of current Government priorities and it is for this reason that the Export Finance Initiative has not been rolled out.

National Debt Servicing

86. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to take advantage of the current historically low interest rates to redeem national debt taken out at the height of the debt crisis and to replace it with new borrowing at a lower rate to make a saving for the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38624/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While it may appear attractive to replace debt that was issued at a higher borrowing cost than the cost that applies to debt issued today, the reality is more complex and less attractive. When bond yields fall, the market value of debt issued at higher rates goes up. This means it would cost the NTMA more to buy that debt from the investors who hold it than the NTMA originally borrowed. Put simply, a holder of a bond that is paying an annual coupon of 5%, for example, will not exchange that bond for a lower coupon without charging a significant premium.

That said, the NTMA has taken steps to significantly reduce the refinancing requirement in the coming years and to reduce the debt service burden.

On 7 September I announced plans to repay early and in full the remaining IMF loan - which has an outstanding balance of circa €4.5 billion – as well the bilateral loans from Denmark and Sweden – which have a combined outstanding balance of €1 billion.

This follows early repayments to the IMF of just over €18 billion between December 2014 and March 2015 and means the full €22.5 billion loan from the IMF, as well as the €1 billion in loans from Denmark and Sweden, will have been repaid ahead of schedule.

The NTMA continues to pre-fund ahead of future obligations and to build up significant cash and liquid asset balances. These balances stood at €20 billion at end August and can be used to fund future debt redemptions such as next month's €6.2 billion bond redemption.

The NTMA has also executed bilateral bond switches involving redeeming early shorter-term bonds in exchange for longer-term bonds, which reduced the 2018-2020 bond refinancing requirement by some €3 billion.

This year the Exchequer interest bill is expected to drop below €6.2 billion as against €7.5 billion as recently as 2014.

Finally, I would also add that through the buy-back of the Floating Rate Notes disposed of by the Central Bank of Ireland, the NTMA is locking in the current low market interest rates and is, in effect, taking out further insurance against rates rising into the future.

Help-To-Buy Scheme

87. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of a group's (details supplied) review of the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38655/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The group to which the Deputy refers was awarded the contract for the review of the Help to Buy initiative following a competi-

tive tender process conducted in accordance with the relevant procedures.

The precise final amount payable upon the satisfactory completion of the review is dependent on allowable additional costs, if any, and so is not yet known. However, I can confirm to the Deputy that the base contract amount agreed with the contractor is consistent with the anticipated cost estimate, set out in paragraph 1.6 of the Request For Tenders document already published by my Department which was “some €50,000 (excl. VAT)”.

The final amount paid to the contractor will be published in due course.

Tax Data

88. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated yield from a 1% levy on online digital advertising to be charged on advertising carried on an Internet or mobile platform here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36792/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Matters pertaining to digital advertising would in the first instance be for my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Change and Environment.

This Department has no basis on which to cost the levy proposed by the Deputy.

Property Tax

89. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost in 2018 of abolishing the local property tax for principal private residences. [36816/17]

90. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount that could be raised in 2018 by doubling the local property tax on second and subsequent properties. [36817/17]

93. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount that could be raised in 2018 by doubling the local property tax on second properties and tripling it on third and subsequent properties. [36820/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89, 90 and 93 together.

I am informed by Revenue that the estimated amount that could be raised in 2018 by doubling the Local Property Tax (LPT) on second and subsequent properties would be in the region of €110m.

Were the rate on third and subsequent properties tripled, I am informed by Revenue that an estimated additional €35m could be raised compared to the scenario where rate was doubled for such properties.

In relation to Question 38616/17, I am informed by Revenue the estimated cost in 2018 of abolishing LPT for principal private residences is in the region of €375m.

Vacant Properties

91. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount that could be raised in 2018 by introducing a levy on residential properties empty for more than six months of €200 per month. [36818/17]

92. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount that could be raised in 2018 by introducing a levy on second and subsequent non-principal private residential properties empty for more than six months of €200 per month. [36819/17]

96. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated annual revenue that could be raised from a tax on residential properties vacant for over one year of 3%, 6%, 10% and 20% respectively. [36824/17]

97. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated annual revenue that could be raised from a tax on second and subsequent residential properties vacant for over six months of 3%, 6%, 10% and 20% respectively. [36825/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 91, 92, 96 and 97 together.

I am informed that no distinction is made in the Tax Code between vacant and occupied properties. It is not possible therefore to derive estimates from Revenue statistics in relation to the Deputy's questions.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 89.

Tax Reliefs Data

94. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount that could be raised annually by abolishing tax reliefs for real estate investment trusts. [36821/17]

95. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the annual cost of all tax reliefs for real estate investment trusts. [36822/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 94 and 95 together.

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) are collective investment vehicles designed to hold rental investment properties in a tax neutral manner. They are focused on long-term holding of income-producing property as opposed to short term speculative gains.

The function of the REIT framework is not to provide an overall tax exemption, but rather to facilitate collective investment in rental property by providing the same after-tax returns to investors as direct investment in rental property and removing a double layer of taxation at corporate and shareholder level which would otherwise apply.

In general, trading profits of Irish companies are subject to Corporation Tax (CT) at the rate of 12.5% and rental profits are subject to CT at 25%. In contrast, rental profits arising in a REIT are exempt from CT, provided the REIT distributes at least 85% of its property income each year. While most property disposals by a REIT will not give rise to Capital Gains Tax (CGT), where a REIT disposes of a newly developed property within 3 years of completion of the development, CGT will arise. Other profits earned by the REIT are subject to CT in the normal way.

Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) at 20% is levied upon distributions by a REIT. An Irish

resident individual can claim a credit for this DWT against his or her income tax liabilities while a non-resident investor may be able to claim a full or partial refund of DWT under a double tax agreement. Pension schemes, life assurance companies, charities or NAMA may receive distribution gross subject to the completion of valid declaration.

As such, the estimated cost attached to the REIT relates not to an exemption from tax, but rather to the move from direct taxation of rental income to the taxation of dividends distributed from REIT profits arising from that rental income. The extent of any net tax cost of the REIT exemptions will therefore be the difference between the tax which would have arisen on the property income in non-REIT ownership, and the tax charged on the dividends paid out of that property income by the REIT to their investors.

Any potential loss of tax relating to foreign investors is due to the difference between how company dividends are taxed in the hands of foreign investors compared to how profits from direct ownership of property are taxed. Ireland, in line with most countries, retains the right to tax profits arising from land and buildings in the State, regardless of where the owner is located. In contrast, taxing rights for dividends are usually divided between countries, based on tax treaty agreements. In general, Ireland allows for dividends of Irish companies to be paid to shareholders resident in treaty partner countries without any liability to Irish tax. This is because tax should already have been paid on the company's profits in Ireland the dividends are paid out of the after-tax profits of the company and the dividends received will form part of the shareholder's income for tax purposes in their country of residence.

In the absence of any other provisions, foreign REIT shareholders would not have had any liability to Irish tax on REIT dividends, despite the fact that the REIT itself benefits from a tax exemption on qualifying profits of the rental business. In order to ensure that tax from foreign investors is retained, a Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) at the standard rate of tax (currently 20%) was legislated for to specifically apply to REIT dividends. Foreign investors from treaty resident countries may be able to reclaim some part of this DWT if the relevant tax treaty allows for this. The taxation of dividends varies from treaty to treaty, but commonly a source State would retain the right to approximately 15% tax on dividends paid from that State.

I am informed by Revenue that their obligation to observe confidentiality for taxpayer information, and the small group of taxpayers involved, precludes them from providing more specific information.

Questions Nos. 96 and 97 answered with Question No. 91.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Capital

98. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of funds in the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, ISIF, potentially available for new investments. [36826/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As at 31 July 2017, the value of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) Discretionary Portfolio was €8.5 billion, of which the Fund has committed €2.9 billion to investments in Ireland. The balance of €5.6 billion is available for investment, as opportunities which meet the Fund's mandate arise.

As set out in the Summer Economic Statement 2017, there is currently a review of the ISIF ongoing.

Corporation Tax Regime

99. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount soon to be lodged by a company (details supplied) into an escrow account as a result of the European Commission investigation into the company's tax affairs here, including the amount due in interest. [36827/17]

236. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to the escrow fund set up for the European Commission's decision regarding a company (details supplied), if the fund earns a return over time from interest and or capital gain, whether the company or the State entity will receive that return; if, in the event of the State receiving a return, it will be deemed to be a financial transaction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39016/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 99 and 236 together.

Notwithstanding the appeal in the Apple State Aid case and the difference in view between Ireland and the Commission on the issue, the Government is committed to complying with the binding legal obligations the Commission's Final Decision places on Ireland.

Apple therefore must be deprived of the benefit of the alleged aid and this involves two actions:

1. The calculation of the amount of aid
2. The process by which Apple are denied this amount of money

The Commission have estimated that this will amount to €13bn but the precise sum is to be calculated using the methodology set out in the Decision, which is then subject to interest as set out in EU Regulations on the recovery of State Aid.

These sums will be placed into an escrow fund with the proceeds being released only when there has been a final determination in the European Courts over the validity of the Commission's Decision.

Given the scale and bespoke nature of such a fund, the precise terms are still being negotiated and are subject to confidential and commercially sensitive deliberations.

Lobbying Data

100. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the details of lobbying of his Department on the sections of the Companies (Accounting) Act pertaining to filing requirements for unlimited companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36830/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the requirements to file returns with the Companies Registration Office is set out in company law. My colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has responsibility for company law and any amendments to it, including those amendments included in the Companies (Accounting) Act 2017. My Department received a small number of representations in relation to the Companies (Accounting) Bill in the period between its publication and enactment. My Office acknowledged such correspondence and forwarded the original letters to the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation as a matter of course.

Tax Data

101. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated intake from corporation tax in 2017 and 2018; and the estimated intake from the top ten and top 20 companies. [36831/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department's latest official forecast is €7.7 billion and €8.0 billion in respect of corporation tax receipts for 2017 and 2018 respectively. This was projected as part of the overall forecasts in the recent Summer Economic Statement 2017. However, as the Deputy will appreciate, all tax-heads will be reviewed as part of annual budgetary process. Therefore, the next official forecast for 2017 and 2018 in respect of corporation tax receipts will be announced as part of Budget 2018, which will take account of the most up to date economic and fiscal information. I am advised by Revenue that while the top 10 largest payers of Corporation Tax accounted for 37% of receipts in 2016, it is too soon to assess their contribution (or that of the top 20) in relation to 2017 receipts as a significant share of 2017 tax has yet to be paid. Receipts from the top 10 or 20 companies are not forecast separately by my Department or Revenue.

European Banking Authority

102. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if the European Banking Authority is responsible for supervising the work of national competent authorities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36839/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Banking Authority (EBA) is an independent EU Authority which works to ensure effective and consistent prudential regulation and supervision across the European banking sector. Its overall objectives are to maintain financial stability in the EU and to safeguard the integrity, efficiency and orderly functioning of the banking sector.

The main task of the EBA is to contribute to the creation of the European Single Rulebook in banking whose objective is to provide a single set of harmonised prudential rules for financial institutions throughout the EU. The EBA also plays an important role in promoting convergence of supervisory practices and is mandated to assess risks and vulnerabilities in the EU banking sector.

The EBA does not have a role in supervising the work of the Central Bank of Ireland or the Financial Services Ombudsman. However, it does perform a number of important functions with respect to competent authorities, including:

Correct application and breach of EU law

The EBA has the power to investigate alleged breaches or non-applications of EU law, either upon request by one or more competent authorities or EU institutions or on its own initiative. The outcome of the EBA investigations into alleged breaches usually consists of recommendations addressed to the competent authority concerned.

Guidelines and recommendations

The EBA produces regulatory guidelines and recommendations with the purpose of providing guidance to banking institutions, investment firms and competent supervisory authorities on the application of EU regulations and directives. If a competent authority does not comply or does not intend to comply, it must inform the EBA of this and state reasons for non-compliance, as prescribed by the 'comply or explain' principle.

Mediation

The EBA has a role in settling disagreements between competent EU authorities in cross-border situations; that is in the supervision or resolution of those institutions that operate in more than one Member State. Upon the request of the competent authorities concerned, or on the EBA's own initiative, the EBA will assist in reaching an agreement. If this cannot be achieved the EBA can then take binding decisions requiring that specific actions are taken, in order to ensure compliance with EU law.

Tax Data

103. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide data on the personal tax take and total tax take as a percentage of GNI* as opposed to GDP for the most recent year available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36893/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The most recent figures for personal tax take, total tax take and modified GNI (GNI*) were released in July of this year as part of the CSO National Income and Expenditure Annual Results 2016 and Government Income and Expenditure (July 2017 Results). The data are collated and reproduced in the table following for the Deputy's convenience.

2016	ESA Code	€million	% GDP	% GNI*
Taxes on production and imports	D.2	23,431	8.5	12.4
Taxes on income, wealth	D.5	29,087	10.6	15.4
Capital Taxes	D.91	411	0.1	0.2
Total Taxes	D.2 + D.5 + D.91	52,928	19.2	28.0

Source: Central Statistics Office.

Disabled Drivers Grant Eligibility

104. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the primary medical certificate scheme in budget 2018 to include autism as a basis for qualification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36905/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme provides relief from VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax, an exemption from motor tax and a grant in respect of fuel expenditure, on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a permanently and severely disabled person within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

The scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise. To qualify for the scheme an applicant must be in possession of a primary medical certificate, which can be obtained if an applicant meets one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;

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

After six months an unsuccessful applicant can re-apply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

The scheme represents a significant tax expenditure, costing approximately €65 million in taxes foregone and grant payments in 2016. This does not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in respect of the relief from motor tax provided to members of the scheme.

I recognise the important role that the scheme plays in increasing the mobility of persons with disabilities. However, changing the current criteria to more general mobility criteria would raise the cost of the scheme and any such increases would require a concomitant increase in tax, reduction in public expenditure or increase in the Exchequer deficit.

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

Departmental Staff Data

105. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisors, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of public or Civil Service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36953/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that the information provided is in respect of the Department of Finance.

In the years 2015 to June 2017 there were 4 political staff employed by my predecessor Deputy Michael Noonan, and the Deputy will find a list of their roles and annual salaries in the table following. The Personal Assistant worked in Deputy Noonan's Constituency Office in Limerick.

Role:	Salary:
Special Advisor	€87,258
Personal Assistant	€54,490
Civilian Driver	€32,966

Civilian Driver	€32,966
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As a result in the change of Government in May 2016, Minister of State, Deputy Eoghan Murphy joined the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and had a dual portfolio with duties for both the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance. As a result of this, both the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance split all costs associated with the staff in the Office of the Minister of State. The figures in the table following show the full cost of each of these staff.

Role:	Salary:
Special Advisor	€57,614
Civilian Driver	€34,699
Civilian Driver	€34,699

I currently have no political staff paid by the Department of Finance. The staff in my Private Office are as follows:

Role:	Salary:
Executive Officers X 2 (WTE)	€83,030
Clerical Officers 3.3 (WTE)	€124,704

I have 1 staff member from the Department of Finance working in my Constituency Office, see the table following.

Role:	Salary:
Clerical Officer	€25,375

In relation to Minister of State Michael D'Arcy, I understand that he has 2 political staff employed, as outlined in the table following.

Role:	Salary:
Civilian Driver	€35,700
Civilian Driver	€35,700

The staff in Minister D'Arcy's Private Office are as follows:

Role:	Salary:
Administrative Officer (Private Secretary)	€77,993
Executive Officer	€28,749
Clerical Officers X 2	€52,000

VAT Yield

106. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of VAT collected from the sale of women's sanitary products (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36988/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): VAT is guided by the EU VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. In Ireland sanitary towels and tampons are charged to VAT at the zero rate. As such, no VAT is collected on the sale of these sanitary products.

Pensions Reform

107. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether allowing

holders of annuity pensions cash their lump sums and pay outstanding taxes would be more beneficial to persons that are in receipt of small monthly amounts from annuity pensions, in view of steps taken recently by the UK government regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36991/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides flexible options at retirement that are available in respect of all benefits from Defined Contribution (DC) retirement benefit schemes and other pension savings. They are also available to members of defined benefit (DB) schemes who are proprietary directors in respect of retirement benefits from their main scheme and from additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) and to other DB scheme members in respect of their AVC benefits only.

As an alternative to using the balance of their pension funds (after taking any retirement lump sum) to purchase an annuity, an individual who is entitled to do so may, subject to conditions, opt to receive the remaining funds in cash (subject to marginal rate income tax) or to invest them in an approved retirement fund (ARF) or an Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF). I am also advised by Revenue that the commutation of small or trivial pensions is allowable in certain limited circumstances on retirement.

Full commutation of pension benefits to a taxable single payment is permitted by Revenue on triviality grounds where, on retirement, the aggregate pension benefits payable to an employee under all schemes related to an employment do not exceed the value of €330 per annum.

Alternatively, where, on retirement and following the payment of any lump sum the total of all funds available for pension benefits is less than €20,000, a once-off payment of the pension benefits to an individual instead of the purchase of an annuity may be allowed with the agreement of the scheme (beneficiaries and) trustees. The quantum of retirement benefits from all sources must be taken into account when calculating this €20,000 limit.

The Deputy's question refers specifically to proposals in the UK to allow for the sale of annuities. Our understanding of the UK position is that the rule changes which would have allowed individuals sell their retirement annuities, and which were due to come into effect in April of this year, are not going ahead.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

108. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners have plans to review their use of 1890 numbers or to provide alternatives, in view of the prevalence of mobile phones which do not have a local call rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37003/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that they received almost 2.7 million telephone calls on their 1890 services in 2016. These calls were handled by staff in various locations throughout the country. From Revenue's perspective, and in particular to deliver the quality, predictability and reliability of service to which they are committed, it is essential to have a telephone system that can handle the significant volume of business involved. The 1890 LoCall system is the current platform that best delivers on the demands for an effective telephone service by Revenue.

I am advised by Revenue that while the 1890 service is a low cost service, many mobile operators do not treat it as a low call service or as part of 'bundled minute packages' and charge standard rates. The question of rates charged by telecoms operators for telephone services is a matter for the Commission for Communications Regulation - ComReg. I am advised by Rev-

enue that they have raised their concerns as regards the charging for calls to the 1890 service with ComReg.

As an alternative to contacting the 1890 services, the vast majority of routine tax and customs enquiries can be answered by reference to the comprehensive information service on www.revenue.ie. This website was recently re-launched making it easier to navigate and find information and it is also now accessible on all smart devices. Revenue also rewrote a considerable amount of the information on the website in plain ordinary language making it even easier for the customer to understand. Revenue also provides an increasing range of cost effective and speedy online services which can be accessed through the myaccount service or ROS.

I am assured by Revenue that it is very conscious of the need to provide a range of comprehensive, flexible, cost effective and reliable service channels to customers. This includes its telephony services. In that context I am also assured that Revenue keeps its telephony infrastructure under ongoing review. Revenue will be happy to assess and exploit the potential of any new technology that will guarantee its ability deliver a robust and reliable telephony service and address the costs issue for mobile phone users.

Tax Code

109. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which windfalls gained through Central Bank mandated redress schemes such as for tracker mortgages are treated for the purposes of income tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37055/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that the Central Bank has clearly set out its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to affected customers in its document “Principles for Redress” dated December, 2015.

The principles provide, inter alia, that “Any tax liability that impacted customers may incur as a result of the relevant issue in or respect of any redress, compensation or other payment made to impacted customers are to be discharged by the lender. The lender is to liaise directly with Revenue in this regard”.

The Principles of Redress provide for a number of different classes of redress payments depending on the harm suffered by individual borrowers. The question of whether a tax liability arises in any given case depends on the specific issues to be redressed and the facts and circumstances of that particular case.

I am advised by Revenue that a number of lending agencies are liaising with them in order to identify any tax liabilities owing and to discharge same.

Budget 2018

110. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Finance if business owners will be able to claim VAT back on car petrol usage in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37056/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Questions - Written Answers
Departmental Staff Data

111. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37071/17]

112. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance the number of men and women respectively in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [37082/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 112 together.

The number of women and men respectively employed in the Department of Finance, by grade, at 31 August, 2017 are shown in the table below: There are no posts at Second Secretary General or Deputy Secretary General level in the Department of Finance.

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Secretary General	1	0	1
Assistant Secretary	5	0	5
Principal Officer	19	6	25
Assistant Principal	37	29	66
Administrative Officer	56	22	78
Higher Executive Officer	13	10	23
Executive Officer	6	16	22
Staff Officer	3	4	7
Clerical Officer	16	44	60
Service Officer	15	2	17
Service Attendant	2	0	2
TOTAL	173	133	306

Knowledge Development Box

113. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost in 2017 of the knowledge development box, by company size, SME or larger, that have applied to the scheme to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37123/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the Knowledge Development Box (“KDB”) was introduced with effect from 1 January 2016. The earliest Corporation Tax returns claiming the KDB would therefore be 2016 returns, the bulk of which are not due to be filed until later this year. When these returns have been filed and subsequently processed and analysed, Revenue will be in a position to provide this data. The estimated cost of the KDB at the time of Budget 2016 was €31 million on a first year basis and €50 million in a full year.

Corporation Tax

114. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects to receive the report by a person (details supplied) on the corporation tax system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37124/17]

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.' I am currently considering this report carefully before deciding on the appropriate next steps.

Tax Avoidance

115. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when the State will ratify the BEPS multilateral instrument; the process for doing same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37125/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Multilateral Instrument will modify existing bilateral tax treaties to bring them into line with new international best practices agreed as part of the OECD BEPS initiative. Over 70 countries, including Ireland, have already signed up to this Multilateral Instrument.

The Multilateral Instrument must be ratified by Ireland before it can come into effect and amend any of our existing tax treaties. The process involves amending the Taxes Consolidation Act to give Government the legal authority to make an Order ratifying the Multilateral Instrument. As with all international agreements, the making of this Government Order will require Dáil approval.

Once this Order has been made, a second legislative provision will be required to include the Multilateral Instrument in the list of ratified international tax agreements set out in Schedule 24A of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997.

My intention is to begin the ratification process as soon as possible and to complete all legislative steps during 2018.

Tax Avoidance

116. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe and the process by which the anti-tax avoidance directives and the directives on administrative co-operation will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37126/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive was agreed by Member States in June 2016 to implement a number of the OECD BEPS recommendations within the EU. In February 2017, Member States agreed to amend the Directive to strengthen certain aspects of the rules in relation to hybrids mismatches.

Ireland will be required to implement the Anti-Tax Avoidance Directives by way of primary legislation over a number of Finance Bills in line with the timeframes provided for in the Directive. These timeframes are:

- Controlled foreign company rules must be implemented by 1 January 2019.
- A General anti-abuse rule must be implemented by 1 January 2019.

- Exit tax rules must be implemented by 1 January 2020.

- Rules to prevent hybrid mismatches, the first elements of which must be implemented by 1 January 2020.

- Interest limitation rules. Ireland has informed the European Commission that, as our existing interest limitation rules are at least equally effective to the rules contained in the Directive, we will be availing of the derogation provided in Article 11(6) of the Directive and are therefore not required to implement these rules until 1 January 2024.

The Directive on Administrative Cooperation enables the exchange of tax information among EU Member States. The Directive was first agreed in 2011 and has been amended five times since then. Ireland has fully implemented all five previous versions of this Directive.

The most recently agreed amendment to the Directive, which is known as DAC6, requires Member States to ensure that tax authorities have access to information required to be held by taxpayers under the money laundering legislation. My intention is to implement DAC6 by way of Regulations before the end of this year.

Brexit Issues

117. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has conducted an economic analysis of the impact of potential customs checks at border points following Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37188/17]

118. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners anticipate increased levels of customs checks and enforcement following Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37189/17]

160. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if there are investigations being conducted by the Revenue Commissioners or his Department regarding the possible erection of customs posts between Ireland and the United Kingdom in the event of a so-called hard Brexit in March 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38033/17]

214. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has conducted an assessment of the additional number of customs officials that may be required in the event of the UK leaving the customs union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38657/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117, 118, 160 and 214 together.

The Government's position in relation to the border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear. Continued freedom of movement, absence of a 'hard' border, and protection of the Good Friday Agreement are key objectives for the Irish Government. The arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK. The Government is clear that any manifestation of a hard border would have very negative consequences. A key priority is to ensure the continued free flow of trade on the island and the need to avoid a hard border. Clearly in this regard the closer the trading relationship between the UK and EU the better.

The European Council Guidelines that set out the EU's position for the Article 50 negotiations state clearly that, in view of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, flexible

and imaginative solutions will be required, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border. It is not helpful to pre-empt any particular outcome at this early stage of the process. Both the Government and the EU Taskforce have welcomed the indications that EU and UK objectives on the Irish issues are converging but have also stressed that the UK needs to back this up with tangible commitments that can pave the way for practical solutions.

My Department has been preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016, with this work now intensified. The primary areas for the Department of Finance relate to the economic and financial sector implications stemming from Brexit. This work is being undertaken within the whole-of-Government framework established by the Department of the Taoiseach. In relation to ongoing analysis of the impact of Brexit, my Department sponsors a joint research programme between the Department of Finance, Revenue and the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) on The Macro-economy and Taxation. This programme began in January 2015 and continues through 2016 and 2017. Its objective is to undertake research on a range of macro-economic and taxation issues in Ireland, this has included a number papers published on different aspects of Brexit (available on the ESRI website www.esri.ie).

Like all Government agencies, the Revenue Commissioners are actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios in order to support Ireland's objectives. Until the shape of post-Brexit arrangements becomes clear, it will not be possible to formulate specific plans. The precise arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK. I am therefore informed by Revenue that at this juncture it is not possible to assess what additional resources would be required if the UK left the customs union. For this reason Revenue's focus to date has centred on upgrading their IT systems in order to have the most advanced systems possible and to maximise the simplifications provided for within the Union Customs Code. I can also confirm that no investigation or planning is being undertaken by my Department or by Revenue in relation to the creation of new customs posts.

The total volume of trade subject to customs checks will increase significantly in the event that customs processes become necessary after Brexit. It is not possible to accurately predict the level of volume increase until the detail of the future EU-UK relationship is known. At present, customs checking mainly consists of verification of documents and examination of records. The number of physical checks of goods is small; less than 2% of all import consignments were physically examined in 2016. The majority of checks are carried out in approved warehouses and other premises with a very small number at a port or airport. The low level of checks is the result of pre-authorisation of traders, advance lodgement of declarations and an extensive system of post-clearance checks, including customs audit, which are carried out at traders' premises.

As previously stated, the nature of the future trading relationship between the EU/Ireland and the UK, and consequent customs arrangements, will be determined by the outcome of the Article 50 negotiations which cannot be prejudged.

VAT Rate Application

119. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the VAT rate for retailers and small businesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37202/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would point out that VAT is charged on the supply of goods and services, and the rate applying is subject to the requirements of EU

VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. The VAT Directive provides that all goods and services are liable to VAT at the standard rate, currently 23% in Ireland, unless there is a provision in the VAT Directive that permits a lower rate. In this respect, when the 9% VAT rate was introduced in 2011 for tourism related services, it was introduced in respect of certain goods and services to which a 9% VAT rate was permissible under EU VAT law, which were deemed relevant to tourism. Some tourism related activity, such as car hire, remains liable to VAT at the 13.5% rate as the provisions of the EU VAT Directive do not allow for a 9% VAT rate to apply to them. In this context VAT does not apply to retailers but to the goods supplied by retailers and the rate applying will depend on the goods being supplied. It is not possible to apply a 9% VAT rate to all supplies made by retailers. EU VAT is a tax on consumption and VAT rates are charged on goods and supplies, not persons.

Any changes to VAT rates outside of what is currently permitted by the EU VAT Directive must be negotiated at EU technical working groups and ultimately agreed by the EU Council of Finance Ministers. The EU Commission published an Action Plan on the future of VAT “Towards a single EU VAT Area - Time to decide”, which sets out the Commission’s pathway for modernising the VAT system and contains a proposal to look at VAT rate policy across the EU in 2017. The Action Plan’s proposal on rates may offer Member States more flexibility in the future in determining VAT rates applicable to goods and services. However, the Deputy will be aware that any proposed changes to the current EU VAT Directive would require unanimous agreement from all Member States.

Motor Insurance

120. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if he will explore the possibility of consumers accessing motor insurance from another well-regulated EU member state; the potential pitfalls for a consumer accessing insurance from another EU member state; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37217/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, the Deputy should note that the EU regulatory framework for insurance already allows for the freedom to provide services from one Member State into another throughout the EU. This is a key principle and is availed of by a number of insurance firms established in Ireland in order to conduct business into other EU Member States, and also by companies authorised elsewhere conducting business into the Irish market. This can be done either through:

- establishing a branch operation in the host country and thus conducting business on a ‘freedom of establishment’ (FOE) basis; or
- writing business from the home country (i.e. where authorised) into the host country on a ‘freedom of services’ (FOS) basis.

In both situations for companies wishing to do business in Ireland, there is a requirement to become a member of the national bureau (Motor Insurers’ Bureau of Ireland (MIBI)) under Section 78 of the Road Traffic Act. This is an important requirement as the MIBI is the body in Ireland tasked with meeting the EU requirement of compensating victims of accidents caused by uninsured and unidentified vehicles. This position has been upheld in the case of *DPP v Lepina and Suhanovs* where one of the conclusions was that a vehicle registered in the State must be insured by a vehicle insurer who is a member of the national bureau (MIBI).

In summary, therefore a vehicle registered and based in Ireland can legally only take out insurance with a company who is a member of MIBI which means that by definition they can-

not purchase motor insurance in another Member State where such companies will be members only of their own national bureau.

This is a complex issue, both in legal terms and commercial terms, which would require a solution at EU level. It would also require a willingness by industry to provide insurance in other markets that they may not be familiar with. In recognition of this, the Cost of Insurance Working Group recommended that my Department support efforts and raise awareness of the need to improve cross-border motor insurance provision at the European level. This work is ongoing and my officials continue to monitor the issue and raise it in the relevant EU fora.

Departmental Banking

121. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37224/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy, my Department is working on the information requested and I will provide the Deputy with an answer as soon as possible.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

122. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason tax relief cannot be claimed in respect of payments made by a parent under a deed of covenant in favour of their permanently incapacitated child; his plans to review this provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37234/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Tax relief can be claimed in respect of payments made by a parent under a deed of covenant in favour of their permanently incapacitated child where that child is 18 years of age or more. However in the case of any child of less than 18 years of age, any payment by a parent under a deed of covenant is deemed under the Tax Acts to be the income of the parent and not income of the child. This is derived from a long-established principle in the income tax code.

Relief from income tax is available under Part 31 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in respect of certain covenants to:

- one or more adults aged 65 or over (the relief available is restricted to 5% of the total income of the person making the covenant),
- permanently incapacitated minors (i.e. under 18 years of age) where the person receiving the covenant is not a child of the person making the covenant, and
- permanently incapacitated adults, including covenants made by a parent for the benefit of their adult child who is permanently incapacitated.

I do not currently have plans to amend this provision, however all tax measures are kept under review by my Department as a matter of course.

It should be noted that an Incapacitated Child Tax Credit of €3,300 per annum is also available to an individual who has custody of, and maintains at his/her own expense, a child who:

- is under 18 years of age and permanently incapacitated physically or mentally,
- is over 18 years of age and unable to support themselves and who became permanently incapacitated before turning 21 years of age,
- became permanently incapacitated aged 21 years or over, but while in full-time education, or
- became permanently incapacitated aged 21 years or over, but while undergoing full-time training for a trade or profession (and the training was expected to last for at least two years).

Further information on this credit can be found on the Revenue website at:- <http://www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/children/incapacitated-child-credit/index.aspx>

Tax Code

123. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given in the Finance Bill 2017 to enable the capital gains tax of 33% to be lowered for legal separation in cases in which the sale of a divorcing couple's shared land holding will have to be used to provide new accommodation for a family member with a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37237/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a capital gains tax (CGT) relief applies in respect of a gain made by a couple who are legally separating on the disposal of their family home together with land occupied as its gardens or grounds up to an area (exclusive of the site of the residence) of one acre. For full relief to apply, the house must have been occupied by the individuals as their family home (principal private residence) throughout the period during which they owned the property. Where the house was not so occupied during the whole period of ownership, only the proportion of the gain applicable to the period of occupation is exempt from CGT. However, the exemption would continue to apply in circumstances where, after the legal separation, the house is occupied by one of the parties as his or her principal private residence. In any event, the last 12 months of the period of ownership is treated as a period of occupation for the purposes of the relief.

Relief is also available in respect of a gain arising on the disposal of a house or part of a house which, during the period of ownership, was the sole residence of a dependent relative. A dependent relative means a relative of the individual or of his/her spouse or civil partner who is incapacitated by old age or infirmity from maintaining himself or herself. For the relief to apply, the house must have been provided rent-free and without any other consideration for the dependent relative. No more than one dwelling house (or part of a dwelling house) may qualify for relief as being the residence of a dependent relative of the claimant at any one time.

Furthermore, there is an exemption from CGT where a parent transfers land to his/her child to enable that child to build a principal private residence for himself/herself. The relief is available if the child builds the house on the land transferred to him or her; it is not available if the parent builds the house and then transfers the house to the child. The relief only applies to sites limited to one acre in addition to the house site itself and with a market value of up to €500,000. Only one CGT-exempt disposal of land is allowed to each "child". If the child subsequently disposes of the land (other than to his/her spouse or civil partner) and the land does not contain a dwelling house which was constructed by the child since the land was acquired and which has been "occupied" by the child as his/her only or main residence for a period of at least three years, then the chargeable gain which would have accrued to the parent shall accrue to the child

in addition to any gain arising to the child on the disposal. However, a further disposal of land to that “child” is entitled to be exempted from CGT if the conditions are met.

Gains arising in respect of other jointly owned property such as, for example, a property which was held by a divorcing or separating couple as an investment are liable to CGT at the rate of 33%. The first €1,270 of a gain accruing to an individual in a tax year is exempt from CGT.

In the absence of more specific information, and on the basis that you have a particular case in mind when asking this question, I hope this response provides the required clarity. If, however, a question still remains for you, you might provide more information about the issue in a written representation, which will allow my officials to provide me with a more targeted answer for you.

Prize Bonds

124. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for the reduction in the yield that applies to the prize bonds prize fund; the yield value of old bonds and prizes distributed over the past ten years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37256/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTMA has advised me the interest rate reduction reflects changes across the retail savings market and the fall in the cost of borrowing by the State. However, the change also maintains the balance of remaining competitive, providing good value for the holders of Prize Bonds while also remaining conscious of the cost to the taxpayer. It should be borne in mind that the yield on prize bonds is State funds that could alternatively be spent on essential public services or reductions in taxation levels.

The NTMA has also advised me that the value of prizes in respect of prize bonds, and these prizes as a percentage of total prize bonds outstanding, over the last ten years, including to date during 2017, are as follows:

Year	Fund at Year End	Prizes Paid	Year-End Fund
	€m	€m	%
2017 (end-July)	3,092	15.4	0.50
2016	2,894	27.9	0.96
2015	2,481	28.9	1.16
2014	2,176	31.7	1.46
2013	1,929	35.2	1.83
2012	1,649	46	2.79
2011	1,448	42	2.90
2010	1,328	35.9	2.70
2009	1,072	27.8	2.59
2008	804	20.3	2.53

Government Bonds

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the NTMA has a role in advising or influencing the rate of disposal by the Central Bank of the Government bonds that replaced the Anglo Irish Bank promissory note; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[37306/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In 2013, the Central Bank acquired eight Floating Rate Notes (FRNs) amounting to €25 billion as part of the exchange of assets on the liquidation of IBRC. The Bank intends to dispose of these assets as soon as possible, financial stability conditions permitting.

The sole responsibility for decisions regarding disposals of the Floating Rate Notes rests with the Central Bank, which publishes information in this regard in its Annual Report.

In accordance with the minimum schedule of disposals agreed with the NTMA in the Exchange option Deed the Bank will sell a minimum amount of the FRNs as follows in accordance with the following schedule:

- 2014-2018 €0.5 billion per annum;
- 2019-2023 €1 billion per annum; and
- from 2024 onwards €2 billion per annum until all bonds are sold.

The eight Floating Rate Notes acquired range in maturity dates from 2038 to 2053. The Bank has so far disposed of €8 billion nominal of the Floating Rate Notes; €0.5 billion in 2014, €2 billion in 2015, €3 billion in 2016 and €2.5 billion so far this year. All holdings of the 2038, 2041 and 2043 Floating Rate Notes have now been disposed of. The outstanding balance of Floating Rate Notes is now €17.0 billion.

Mortgage Interest Relief Data

126. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 112 of 26 August 2017, the number of years the person continues receiving tax relief at source, TRS, as a non-first-time buyer. [37307/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I believe the Deputy intended to refer to Parliamentary Question No. 112 of 26 July 2017.

In my reply on 26 July I provided an overview of section 244 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which provides tax relief in respect of interest paid by an individual on a loan used for the purchase, repair, development or improvement of his or her main residence or the sole or main residence of his or her civil partner, dependant relative or his or her former or separated spouse, and I set out in some detail the changes made to this section in the Finance Acts of 2009, 2010 and 2012.

In response to the Deputy's specific question, I am advised by Revenue that tax relief continues to apply up to the end of the current tax year 2017, in respect of interest paid on qualifying loans taken out by either a non-first time buyer or a first time buyer between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2012. The Deputy will be aware that, as a result of the gradual phasing out of Mortgage interest relief (MIR), tax relief is now available only in respect of interest paid on qualifying home loans taken out between 2004 and 2012 and has been abolished for homes purchased on or after 1 January 2013. MIR is currently due to expire for the remaining recipients on 31 December 2017, however in Budget 2017 the Government's intention to extend MIR beyond the current end-date of December 2017 on a tapered basis to 2020 was confirmed, in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government.

Tracker Mortgages

127. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals that have been made to the customers appeals panel section regarding a bank (details supplied), in view of the tracker mortgage issue; the number which have been fully upheld, partially upheld and totally dismissed respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37326/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Officials in the Department referred the Deputy's question to the bank and received the following response in this regard:

“Under the Bank’s Mortgage Redress Programme (MRP), to date there have been a total of 224 appeals to the Customer Appeals Panel (CAP). The Bank has received the decision of the CAP in 207 of these appeals. The following is a breakdown of the decisions of the CAP:

Decisions of CAP	Number
Upheld	4
Partly Upheld	27
Not Upheld	176

Under the Bank’s subsequent Mortgage Product Review Group (MPRG), to date there have been a total of two appeals. The Bank has yet to receive a decision of the CAP on these two appeals.”

VAT Rate Application

128. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to retain the 9% VAT rate for the hotel sector (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37406/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, it is a longstanding practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

129. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the mechanism in place for those seeking to recoup their first-time buyers’ grant following an eligible house purchase if the builder or developer is not registered as a qualified contractor with the Revenue Commissioners and refuses to engage with the householder. [37458/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the Help-to-Buy (HTB) scheme. It states that in order for a first time purchaser to be eligible for the HTB scheme, he or she must enter into a contract with a qualifying contractor. If first-time purchasers do not purchase from a qualifying contractor, it is not an eligible house purchase.

However, I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that to consider the matter further, if the Deputy could provide all relevant details around the circumstances of any particular relevant property purchase to them, they will arrange to have the matter looked into.

Tax Reliefs Costs

130. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reintroducing the rent relief tax credit in budget 2019 on the same basis as pre 2010. [37474/17]

181. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of reintroducing the rent tax credit that was suspended in 2010 for all persons in the private rental market. [38122/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 130 and 181 together.

I am advised by Revenue that the number availing of the rent relief tax credit, and the associated cost to the Exchequer, are available on the Revenue website at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx>. The credit is available to those paying for private rented accommodation. This includes rent paid for flats, apartments or houses. It does not include rent paid to local authorities. The credit is currently only available to a person who was renting on 7 December 2010. This tax credit will cease to be available after 31 December 2017.

I am advised by Revenue that, as the rent relief tax credit is in the process of being phased out, and no new claimants have qualified for the relief since 2010, tax returns do not provide a reliable basis for Revenue to accurately predict either the numbers of tenants that could be eligible to claim a rent credit were it to be re-introduced post 2017 for all tenants, or the degree to which potential claimants could absorb the full amount of the credit. Therefore, there is no reliable basis available to Revenue on which to estimate the potential cost of a rent credit reintroduction.

At the same time, it may be of assistance to the Deputy to note that, according to Census 2016 data, the private rented sector amounts to approximately 310,000 units. For comparison, in 2010 the rent relief tax credit cost €82.8 million in respect of 189,000 claimants. However, all of the individuals recorded on the Census as renting these 310,000 units may not qualify for rent relief tax credit or be able to absorb the relief in full if it were available, and so this would not be a robust basis on which to estimate a costing.

NAMA Portfolio

131. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the number and acreage of NAMA-owned properties and landbanks by property type (details supplied) and by county, in tabular form. [37576/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA does not, in general, own land or property. Rather, NAMA's role is as a secured lender and the properties which NAMA holds security over continue to be owned and managed by the original property owner, or insolvency practitioner where one is appointed.

In relation to a breakdown of NAMA's remaining portfolio, I would direct the Deputy towards page 46 NAMA's Annual Report 2016, which was published on 1 June 2017 and is available via: <https://www.nama.ie/about-us/publications/annual-reports/>. The NAMA Annual Report 2016 outlines the geographic and sectoral distribution of NAMA's remaining portfolio. The relevant information is provided below in Tables 1 and 2 below for the Deputy's ease of reference. As outlined in Table 2, 64% of NAMA's remaining portfolio is located in Dublin.

A total of 18% of NAMA's remaining portfolio is located in the rest of the country, excluding Dublin. A county-by-county breakdown of this portfolio is included in Table 3. Of the Irish

assets located outside of Dublin, 86% are located in the cities of Cork and Galway or the counties in the Dublin commuter belt. I am advised by NAMA that outlining sectoral distribution of NAMA-secured assets on a county-by-county basis and in the breakdown categories requested by the Deputy could identify specific property assets and their owner, which is prohibited under the NAMA Act 2009.

Table 1: Remaining Portfolio – Sectoral Distribution - As at 31 Dec 2016

Remaining Portfolio Sectoral Distribution	Total %
Residential	17%
Development	21%
Office	13%
Land	30%
Retail	11%
Hotel & Leisure	5%
Industrial	1%
Non Real Estate	2%

Table 2: Remaining Portfolio – Geographic Distribution - As at 31 Dec 2016

Remaining Portfolio Geographical Distribution	Total %
Dublin	64%
Rest of Ireland (excl. Dublin)	18%
London	10%
Rest of UK	2%
Rest of World	4%
Non Real Estate	2%

Table 3: Remaining Portfolio – Rest of Ireland (Excl. Dublin) – County by County Distribution - As at 31 Dec 2016

County	Total %
Cork	37.68%
Kildare	21.72%
Wicklow	16.19%
Galway	5.42%
Meath	4.76%
Sligo	3.63%
Westmeath	2.70%
Louth	2.43%
Limerick	1.24%
Waterford	1.12%
Wexford	0.97%

Departmental Consultations

132. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Finance when the report commissioned by his Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection on bogus self employment practices in the construction sector and resultant losses incurred in PAYE and PRSI will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37596/17]

162. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the drafting, completion and publication of the report investigating bogus self employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38036/17]

173. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance when the results of the consultation process into the impact of bogus self employment arrangements will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38049/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132, 162 and 173 together.

The consultation process on “the use of intermediary-type employment structures and self-employment arrangements and their impact on tax and PRSI” invited submissions from interested parties on possible measures to address the loss to the Exchequer that may arise under two sets of arrangements:

- where an individual, who would otherwise be an employee, establishes a company to provide his or her services, and

- where an individual, who is dependent on, and under the control of, a single employer in the same manner as an employee, is classified as a self-employed individual.

I am not in a position to give the Deputy an exact date for publication but I am informed that the drafting and editing of the report, being undertaken by a working group of officials, is virtually complete so I expect to receive it shortly.

As soon as it reaches me, and my colleague the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, we will consider its contents and then I expect we will publish it.

IBRC Liquidation

133. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance the frequency of meetings between his Department and the special liquidators of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; when the last meeting took place; if regular updates are provided at such meetings on costs charged and incurred by the special liquidators; the oversight examination and decision making undertaken regarding the costs charged and incurred by the special liquidators by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37603/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Following the liquidation of IBRC in February 2013 officials met with the Special Liquidators on a very frequent basis; however, given the progress being made on the liquidation, the frequency of these meetings has reduced as is to be expected. There were eight update meetings held between my officials and the Special Liquidators in 2016 and three update meetings have taken place so far this year. I am advised by my officials that the most recent formal meeting with the Special Liquidators took place on 6 June 2017 and that the next formal meeting is due to take place before the end of September. Officials also speak regularly with the Special Liquidators outside of a formal meeting setting as matters arise. At these formal meetings the Special Liquidators update officials on the progress of the liquidation and bring to their attention any issues which they feel my Depart-

ment should be made aware of during these meetings. Should my officials have any queries in relation to the professional fees associated with the liquidation or other costs incurred then this matter would be raised during these update meetings.

In addition to regular meetings the Department also receives and publishes regular progress update reports in relation to the Special Liquidation. These reports include a comprehensive update on fees and costs incurred as part of the Special Liquidation. The latest report was provided to the Department in May 2017 and covered the period to the end of 2016. The report is published on the Department's website at http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/170505-IBRC-Progress-update-report-report_31-Dec-16.pdf.

IBRC Liquidation

134. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance the costs charged and incurred by the special liquidators of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation by charging rates per hour or parts thereof; the number of hours or parts thereof actually charged by the types of work performed; the descriptions of work performed; the number of persons performing the work in respect of each of the foregoing categories from 7 February 2013 to date in 2017, in respect of each grade (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37604/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would like to draw the Deputy's attention to the most recent progress update report on the Special Liquidation of IBRC which was published on 5th May 2017 and which is available on the Department of Finance website: http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/170505-IBRC-Progress-update-report-report_31-Dec-16.pdf. The fees and all other third party costs as at 31 December 2016 are outlined in detail in this report.

The costs of the Special Liquidators for the liquidation from 7 February 2013 to 31 December 2016 stood at €123.11m. This figure is net of a rebate of €5m which the Department of Finance agreed with KPMG. This €123.11m relates to fees for work carried out by the KPMG special liquidation team and the scope of work undertaken by the Special Liquidators is detailed in each of the four publicly available progress update reports which have been published since the special liquidation of IBRC in 2013. The fees are net of VAT and outlays. In addition, a further €4.56m was incurred by the special liquidation team which has been recovered from NAMA.

While I am advised by the Special Liquidators that they are not in a position to provide details in relation to the number of persons, by grade, performing the work on the special liquidation given the commercial sensitivities around this information, they have provided a more detailed breakdown of the €123.1m of fees incurred to 31 December 2016:

Fees to 31 December 2016	Fees €m
Workstreams	Total
Deal	30.14
Finance, operations, compliance and creditor adjudications	17.74
Loan management	16.41
HR/IT/Facilities	8.28
Loan migration	16.72
Interest remediation	20.63

Taxation	9.32
Legal and litigation	4.30
Commission of investigation	2.71
CBI tracker mortgage examination	0.80
Deposits and ELG	1.06
Discount applied	(5.00)
Total	123.11
NAMA integration (recharged by bank to NAMA)	4.56

The most recent progress update report also details the cost management undertaken by the Special Liquidators. These are the various steps taken by the Special Liquidators when hiring legal and third party advisors/contractors to ensure costs were managed efficiently and effectively and minimised while ensuring the orderly wind up of IBRC.

I am further advised by the Special Liquidators that it is not possible for them at this time to confirm or estimate the final fees of the liquidation as there remains a number of tasks in the liquidation to be completed including the ongoing management of circa 175 legal cases, the completion of the creditor adjudication process, the work with the Commission of Investigation, the management of the remaining loan book and the realisation of all remaining assets.

IBRC Liquidation

135. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department or its agents or the Comptroller and Auditor General has examined the procurement processes, accounting, controls and oversight of the costs of the special liquidators of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; the results of such examinations; the location in which they are published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37605/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Neither the Department of Finance nor the Comptroller and Auditor General have any role in relation to examining the procurement processes of the Special Liquidators. The liquidation of IBRC is similar to any other liquidation with the exception that the Special Liquidators have been appointed by the Minister under the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Act 2013 rather than appointed by the Courts. As such the Special Liquidators are obliged to follow normal Companies Acts priorities throughout the liquidation process and act in a manner that ensures the assets of IBRC are managed in a way which maximises the overall return for all its creditors including the State subject to the provisions of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Act 2013.

Notwithstanding this, the Department of Finance engages regularly with the Special Liquidators on the issue of costs as part of its regular engagement with the Special Liquidators. Page 45 of the most recent progress update report published by the Department sets out the various cost management activities undertaken by the Special Liquidators and the nature of the ongoing interaction with the Department in this regard. A copy of that report can be accessed at: http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/170505-IBRC-Progress-update-report-report_31-Dec-16.pdf.

IBRC Liquidation

136. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if he will furnish a copy of the contract between his Department and the special liquidators of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37606/17]

137. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if he will furnish a copy of the indemnity provided by his Department to the special liquidators of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation as part of the conduct of the liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation and correspondence relating thereto; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37607/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 137 together.

In February 2013 Kieran Wallace and Eamonn Richardson of KPMG were appointed on foot of the Special Liquidation Order by the then Minister for Finance as Special Liquidators of IBRC and were tasked with managing the winding-up of the institution. This process is ongoing. The Special Liquidators are obliged to comply with the instructions given to them by the Minister for Finance and act in the interests of the taxpayer under the provisions of the IBRC Act. The primary set of instructions were issued to the Special Liquidators on 7 February 2013 and they set out details in respect of the manner in which the winding up of IBRC was to proceed. A copy of this instruction can be accessed at the following link: http://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWData/Library3/FINdocslaid08022013_143303.pdf. Further Ministerial instructions relevant to the liquidation of IBRC were issued on 10 May 2013, on 20 July 2013 and on 24 April 2014. Copies of these Ministerial Instructions were laid before the Houses and can also be found online on the Oireachtas library database.

I am advised that the specific correspondence and documentation sought by the Deputy in relation to the Special Liquidation of IBRC contains commercially sensitive information given the ongoing nature of the liquidation so I am therefore not in a position to publish such records at this time.

IBRC Expenditure

138. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance if there has been an increase in the rates of fees charged by the special liquidators of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation since the date of their appointment; if an increase in the rates of fees has been approved directly or by reference to NAMA fee rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37608/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There has been no increase in the rates of fees charged by the Special Liquidators of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation Limited since the date of their appointment. The rates being charged are based on NAMA-negotiated rates for relevant services. These NAMA rates were put in place following a competitive tender conducted by NAMA.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

139. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the help-to-buy scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37680/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act is the legislation that provides for the Help-to-Buy initiative. The legislation states

that in order for a first-time purchaser to be eligible for Help to Buy, he or she must enter into a contract with a Qualifying Contractor. If first-time purchasers do not purchase from a Qualifying Contractor, it is not an eligible house purchase.

For reasons of taxpayer confidentiality, I am advised by Revenue that they cannot comment on the tax affairs of an individual taxpayer or business. However, I am advised by Revenue that discussions designed to facilitate an application from the persons concerned under the Help-to-Buy scheme are being actively pursued.

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

140. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new positions made available in the Central Bank specifically to deal with Brexit; the types of new roles created; the number of vacancies left to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37736/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed that the Central Bank Commission approved an additional complement for 2017 to circa 1,800 staff, which will be a target net increase of 200 staff on the total at end 2016. This expansion included dedicated resources of an additional 28 staff to address specific Brexit-related new business needs within existing divisions. Of these 28 staff, 18 have been allocated to supervisory divisions to address specific Brexit-related new business needs within existing divisions, while the remaining 10 have been allocated to the Central Banking pillar.

Furthermore, at its recent June 2017 meeting, the Central Bank Commission approved an additional 36 resources principally to support increases in Brexit-related authorisation/supervisory activity, as well as to support extensions to the post crisis regulatory framework under the European Commission's November 2016 Risk Reduction Measures package and the proposed new EU framework for the recovery and resolution of central counterparties. Resources will be deployed across both Financial Regulation and Central Banking.

Recruitment is planned to be undertaken on a phased basis, with the hiring process already commenced for some of the roles, and it is expected that the majority of such roles will be filled by 31 December 2017.

Services for People with Disabilities

141. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which his Department is improving services and increasing supports for persons with disabilities during 2017. [37737/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that the Deputy's question is focused in particular on my Department's Website, Audio & Telecommunications Services which are available to external customers and users.

I am please to confirm that, in line with the commitments set out in our Customer Charter, our newly relaunched Departmental website has been designed with the aim of achieving conformance Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and the relevant National Disability Authority IT accessibility guidelines.

As previously set out in my response to Parliamentary Question No. 161 of 13 July 2017, my Department is aware of its obligations as set out in the Disability Act of 2005. In line with

the legislation a Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) and Access Officers are in place within the Department. The contact details for these officers are available on the Department's website:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/obligations/access-officers-for-the-department/>.

The Department works closely with the National Disability Authority (NDA) in ensuring its compliance with the legislation in relation to the employment of persons with disabilities and since 2014, the Department's obligations under the legislation have been satisfied.

The DLO attends bi-monthly Disability Liaison Officer Network meetings to share knowledge and assist other DLOs across the Civil Service, as well as engaging with staff in accessing training and learning events, where needed. An example of engagement includes during 2016 and 2017, the Department employed speed typists to assist staff at various learning events.

Over the last year, a major refurbishment project was undertaken by OPW in Government Buildings on Merrion Street. As part of this project, electronic access doors have been installed to assist the movement of staff across our campus. Furthermore, ergonomic assessments have been undertaken for staff in both the Merrion Street campus and in our offices in Tullamore. This assessment programme will be rolled out to staff at other locations in the coming months.

Motor Insurance Costs

142. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons here are getting insurance quotes three times cheaper in Northern Ireland; his plans regarding the rising cost of motor insurance; when persons will see this intervention in their pockets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37738/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Differing costs of insurance between different markets and jurisdictions is an issue that exists across the EU. This arises for a range of reasons such as for instance differences in the size and volume of insurance awards. While I cannot comment on the particular circumstances of the quotations that the Deputy references, and if such differences are typical, I would note that Northern Ireland's motor insurance market is a distinct and separate one, and as a result differences in pricing will inevitably arise.

The European Commission's Green Paper on Retail Financial Services considered this issue and the provision of insurance and other retail financial services on a cross-border basis. With regard to the provision of insurance, it noted that "there is evidence of market fragmentation in the differing prices for identical or similar products available in different domestic markets, even from the same provider." It also acknowledged that: "differences in prices can be attributed to factors such as varying conditions in domestic economies, uneven levels of purchasing power, financial or institutional structures (e.g. taxation, regulation or supervision), or differing funding costs, value propositions (sometimes related to product tying or packaging) and pricing structures in local markets. For insurance (specifically motor insurance) variations in the costs and risks of providing cover can vary substantially between the different Member States, which can justify some price differences." It is primarily for these reasons therefore that differences may exist between two separate markets.

With regard to addressing the cost of insurance, my predecessor as Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, established the Cost of Insurance Working Group in 2016 in order to examine the factors contributing to the increasing cost of insurance and identify what short, medium and long-term measures can be introduced to help reduce the cost of insurance for consumers and businesses. The initial focus of the Working Group was the problem of rising motor insurance premiums and as a result, a broad range of issues affecting the cost of motor

insurance were examined.

The Working Group's Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are clearly set out in an Action Plan. 45 of these action points are due to be implemented by the end of this year with the remainder scheduled for completion before the conclusion of 2018.

There is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress and the first such update was published in early May. The second quarterly update was published on the Department's website on 21 July 2017 and shows the progress to date on the overall implementation of the recommendations, with a particular focus on the 17 action points which were due for completion in the second quarter of 2017. All 17 of these action points have been completed by their deadline. A further report for the third quarter will issue in the coming weeks.

I believe that the implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums over the next 18 months. I also believe that the Setanta judgment, by finding that MIBI is not liable to meet third party claims, removes a major uncertainty from industry, which I would expect to be reflected in pricing in the short to medium term.

Finally, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for August) indicates that motor insurance premiums have reduced by 14% year-on-year. While CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures only represent a broad average and therefore there are some people who may still be seeing increases for various reasons. I am hopeful that greater stability in pricing will continue to occur, and that premiums will continue to fall from the very high level of last year.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

143. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding an application (details supplied). [37753/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the contractor from whom the persons concerned purchased the property is not on the register of approved contractors. I am also advised that there is some doubt in relation to the eligibility of the property in question for the Help-To-Buy scheme. I understand that Revenue is making direct contact with the persons concerned to make clear the issues and concerns that are preventing the approval of the application from the persons concerned.

Personal Contract Plans

144. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the rapid increase in personal contract plan, PCP, credit instruments in the motor industry; if his Department has assessed the default risk of such instruments; and if banks, financial institutions and other financial subsidiaries such as car manufacturers themselves have been sufficiently regulated by the Central Bank to lend to car buyers in the market. [37757/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Personal Contract Plans (PCP) are a form of Hire Purchase and both the Central Bank and the Competition and Consumer Protec-

tion Commission (CCPC) have certain functions and legal powers in relation to the provision of hire-purchase agreements.

Hire-purchase providers are not required to seek authorisation from the Central Bank or the CCPC for the provision of hire-purchase agreements. In turn, hire-purchase providers are not subject (for the provision of a hire purchase agreement) to the requirements of the Consumer Protection Code 2012, which sets out requirements regarding the sales process, including suitability and affordability requirements and requirements regarding complaints handling.

The majority of consumer hire purchase agreements are provided through ‘credit intermediaries’.

The CCPC is responsible under the Consumer Credit Act 1995, for the authorisation of credit intermediaries, some of whom may sell PCPs to consumers on behalf of a finance company. A “credit intermediary” is defined as “a person...who in the course of his business arranges or offers to arrange for a consumer the provision of credit or the letting of goods in return for a commission, payment or consideration of any kind from the provider of the credit or the owner, as the case may be”.

The CCPC issues licenses to credit intermediaries and keeps an online list of credit intermediaries holding a valid authorisation which is available on the CCPC website www.ccpc.ie. The CCPC deals with complaints about the advertising of Credit Agreements and the advertising of car finance on credit intermediary websites and in the media. It also has a specific statutory remit to provide personal finance information and education to consumers.

The CCPC has conducted research into the car market and car finance sectors, and has conducted numerous public awareness campaigns on the issue of car finance in recent years. It’s most recent campaign, which ran in June/July 2017, focused on car finance and was specifically aimed at providing information to consumers on issues in relation to PCPs, such as the fact that the consumer does not become the legal owner of the car until they make the final payment.

On 17 July the CCPC announced that it had commenced a study of the PCP car finance market. I have been informed that the CCPC’s study is examining the experiences of consumers and assessing the information provided to them at the point-of-sale. The study will also analyse consumers’ understanding of PCPs, the structure of the product, the options available to consumers at the end of the agreement, and the protections available to PCP consumers under the existing legislative framework. I await the outcome of the study.

The Deputy may also wish to note that if a consumer has concerns regarding the activities of credit intermediaries, they may wish to contact the CCPC. The Financial Services Ombudsman can also investigate complaints from individual consumers about credit intermediaries.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

145. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review a scheme (details attached) in view of the comments of the Ombudsman in this case and in many other similar cases referred to the Ombudsman by this Deputy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37758/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme provides relief from VAT and Vehicle Registration Tax, an exemption from motor tax and a grant in respect of fuel expenditure, on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a permanently and severely disabled person within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and

Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

The scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise. To qualify for the scheme an applicant must be in possession of a primary medical certificate, which can be obtained if an applicant meets one of the following conditions:

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

After six months an unsuccessful applicant can reapply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

The scheme represents a significant tax expenditure, costing approximately €65 million in taxes foregone and grant payments in 2016. This does not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in respect of the relief from motor tax provided to members of the scheme.

I recognise the important role that the scheme plays in increasing the mobility of persons with disabilities. However, changing the current criteria to more general mobility criteria would raise the cost of the scheme and any such increases would require a concomitant increase in tax, reduction in public expenditure or increase in the Exchequer deficit.

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

Housing Issues

146. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have met recently with a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37806/17]

147. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has reviewed a Bill (details supplied) published by a group as a proposed solution to the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37807/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 147 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Housing Co-operative Bill 2017 has been initiated in

Seanad Éireann and the Bill has also been the subject of consideration by the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Taoiseach. When I appeared before the Committee on 6 July last in advance of the upcoming July ECOFIN meeting, I was happy to facilitate a request from the Committee Chairman for Department officials to meet with the Right2Homes group who developed the Bill. That meeting subsequently took place on 21 July 2017, with Deputy McGuinness and some of the members of the Right2Homes group in attendance. There was a constructive and useful exchange of views at the meeting but it was also clearly indicated that overall Government position on the Bill was that as set out during the Seanad Second Stage debate.

European Council Meetings

148. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the most recent meeting of ECOFIN; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37808/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The last ECOFIN Council, that I attended, took place on 11 July 2017 in Brussels. It was the first Council of the Estonian Presidency. The main items discussed are as follows.

Legislative deliberations

Ministers were debriefed on the state of play on the current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

The Commission presented a proposal regarding mandatory automatic exchange of information in the field of taxation. This proposal seeks to amend the Directive on Administrative Cooperation, which provides for the reporting and exchange of information between national tax authorities. The Commission noted that some countries already have mandatory disclosure rules in place and it was agreed to accord high priority to the matter and to have the necessary technical work commence immediately.

Non-legislative activities

On the non-legislative portion of the agenda, the Estonian Minister presented the Presidency work programme and priorities for the next six months. This is usual at the first Council of a new Presidency. The Minister listed its key priorities being in the area of banking union and capital markets union, taxation issues and EU budget related matters.

Ministers adopted draft Council conclusions on the Commission Mid-Term Review of the Capital Markets Union Action Plan.

Ministers also held an exchange of views and adopted draft Council conclusions on Non-Performing Loans.

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

149. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff on secondment from the Central Bank; his views on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37809/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank is committed to increased participation and influence in international fora and as a result secondments to roles of

strategic importance are a key priority. The Bank also attaches importance to secondments as development opportunities.

I am informed that as at 31 August 2017, the Central Bank of Ireland has 75 employees on secondment.

Mortgage Lending

150. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the effect the mortgage deposit rules are having on persons' ability to purchase homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37810/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland, in line with its mandate to safeguard financial stability, has put in place macro-prudential measures for residential mortgage lending. These measures apply proportionate loan-to-value and loan-to-income limits to mortgage lending by regulated financial service providers in the Irish market.

The Central Bank is independent in the formulation and implementation of these macro prudential measures and they are now a permanent feature of the residential mortgage market. The Central Bank advises that they are operating in line with their stated objectives of enhancing the resilience of banks and borrowers to future shocks and reducing the risk of credit house price spirals from developing.

The Central Bank undertook a broad-based review of the overall framework of the mortgage lending measures in 2016, which confirmed that it is effective and that it is contributing to financial and economic stability by reducing the risk of unsustainable lending and borrowing. The Central Bank continuously monitors developments in the housing and credit markets, and it regularly publishes relevant analysis through its Macro-Financial Review and Household Credit Market Report. The Bank has indicated that, having regard to recent data from the Banking Payments Federation Ireland and the Central Statistics Office on residential mortgage activity and overall transactions in the market, it is estimated that the share of home-buyer transactions financed by a mortgage has risen from 60.3 per cent in the year ending 2016q2 to 68.8 per cent in the year ending 2017q2.

In line with its procedures, the Central Bank reviews the calibration of the mortgage lending measures on an annual basis having regard to prevailing market conditions and the objectives of the measures. I am advised that it is expected that this year's review will culminate in a decision on the appropriate calibration of the measures for 2018 at a meeting of the Central Bank Commission on 28 November next.

Motor Insurance

151. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the practice whereby car insurers charge different premiums on the basis of postcode, resulting in charge variations of hundreds of euro for car owners who live only minutes apart; if this practice is lawful; if not, the actions he will take on the issue; and if he will review the matter to make such practices illegal in view of the fact that they are discriminatory. [37894/17]

186. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if his and the cost of insurance working group's attention has been drawn to the significant variations in motor insurance pre-

miums being charged by insurance companies depending on the location in which a person is living in Dublin (details supplied); if the working group will address these practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38189/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 186 together.

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

I am advised that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. Factors can include the type and age of car, as well as the age, driving experience, claims record and penalty points of the driver, the number of drivers, how the car is used, and the location where it is normally stored etc. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience.

The Deputy should note that Insurance Ireland operates a free Insurance Information Service for those who have queries, complaints or difficulties in relation to obtaining insurance. Insurance Ireland can be contacted at feedback@insuranceireland.eu or 01-6761914.

Tracker Mortgages Examination

152. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding tracker mortgage examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37911/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Tracker Mortgage Examination is the largest most complex and significant supervisory review that the Central Bank has undertaken to date in the context of its consumer protection mandate and involved an initial review of more than two million mortgage accounts by lenders to identify the number of “in scope” accounts. The Examination continues to be a priority for the Central Bank.

As set out in its most recent update report on the examination of tracker mortgage-related issues as published last March:-

(<https://www.centralbank.ie/news-media/press-releases/update-report-tracker-mortgages>), the Central Bank invoked its powers under Section 22 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act to set specific timelines for lenders to complete Phase 2 (the “Review Phase”) of the Examination. In line with those timelines, the Central Bank expects the vast majority of impacted customers to be identified by lenders by end September 2017. However, as the lenders’ reviews are subject to assurance work by the Central Bank, it is possible that additional impacted accounts may be identified post this date. The Central Bank has and continues to challenge lenders through a combination of bilateral engagements and on-site assurance work to ensure that this Review Phase is completed as quickly and accurately as possible.

Lenders are currently at varying stages of their reviews and the Bank continues to challenge them to ensure that deadlines for completion are met.

The Central Bank has clearly articulated its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to all impacted customers in line with prescribed principles for redress developed by the Central Bank. The timeframes for progression of the redress and compensation programmes vary from lender to lender, however, the Central Bank remains focused on challenging lenders to ensure that they are progressing redress and compensation and that impacted customers are treated fairly. Some lenders have already commenced redress and compensation programmes and these programmes, along with the Central Bank's assurance work, will continue beyond September 2017 for some lenders.

Much of the information requested by the Deputy is lender specific supervisory information. However, I am advised that the Central Bank is not in a position to comment on individual lenders due to confidentiality requirements under Central Bank legislation. Nevertheless, as indicated above, in overall terms the Central Bank published a comprehensive update report in March 2017 and the Central Bank advises that a further update report on the Examination will be issued later in the autumn.

Mortgage Lending

153. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the Central Bank policy on banks providing bridging finance to elderly persons wishing to downsize to another property; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that such persons, many of whom have very significant positive equity, have to sell their home before they can purchase a smaller, more suitable property and this is acting as a deterrent to them proceeding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37952/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Residential mortgage lending to consumer borrowers, including bridging finance which is provided for a housing purpose, has to comply with the legislative and regulatory provisions which govern such lending, including the relevant provision of the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 and the Consumer Protection Code. However, within this framework it then remains a policy and commercial decision of the Boards and management of individual lenders to decide on the particular type of housing related credit products or agreements they wish to offer to prospective borrowers. Therefore, while the existing legal and regulatory framework does not prevent lenders from offering and providing bridging finance for a housing purpose, the decision on whether or not to assume the particular commercial risk (and the associated potential commercial gain) associated with such lending will be one for the individual lender.

Tax Code

154. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to the changes to the section 110 tax structure introduced in the Finance Act 2016, if property funds that purchase residential and commercial loans from NAMA and banks operating here will no longer be able to avail of this structure in respect of the profits earned on the holding of such loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37955/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 22 of the Finance Act 2016 made an amendment to section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 to address the concern that some section 110 companies were being used to minimise the Irish tax exposure on Irish

property transactions. The core effect of the amendment is to remove the possibility for section 110 companies to use what are known as ‘profit participating notes’ to sweep Irish property or distressed debt profits out of the company in a way that ensures little or no Irish tax liability arises.

This is to be achieved by, for the purposes of section 110, treating the holding of Irish mortgages as a separate business which will not be entitled to a tax deduction for the coupon on the profit participating note. Therefore, while section 110 companies may still purchase loans, the profits made by the section 110 company on their Irish mortgages will be taxable.

By treating the holding of the Irish mortgages as a separate business, this will ensure the protection of the Irish tax base regarding Irish property transactions, while simultaneously maintaining the section 110 regime, and all the benefits associated with it, for the wider use in de-leveraging by financial institutions.

The amendment does not permit the companies to ‘mark to market’ and applies to profits arising on or after 6 September 2016. Ireland, in both its domestic legislation and its double tax treaties, maintains the right to tax land in the State. Loans which derive their value from land in the State are an interest in land, and so we also maintain the right to tax profits associated with those loans.

Tax Code

155. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance further to the changes to the section 110 tax structure introduced in the Finance Act 2016, if he will state the definition of a bona fide use of the section 110 tax structure in keeping with the original intention behind the establishment of the structure for securitisation purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37956/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 110 is intended to create a tax neutral regime for bona fide securitisation and structured finance purposes. It has been part of our corporation tax code since 1991, with significant amendments in 2003. Securitisation involves the creation of tradeable securities out of an income stream or projected future income stream generated by financial assets. The transaction can involve the use of a special purpose securitisation vehicle to facilitate the transaction and issue the securities.

Securitisation allows banks to raise capital and to share risk, and by providing a repackaging and resale market for corporate debt, it lowers the cost of debt financing.

The section 110 regime was designed to improve Ireland’s offering as a location for the conduct of financial services. It has achieved that broad goal and the financial services industry now makes use of these vehicles as a support to financial intermediation. Such financing is useful for the productive economy as it can underpin the supply of finance to industries and companies in Ireland, Europe and further afield.

Ireland is not unique in having a specific regime for securitisations. The importance of securitisation has been recognised by the European Commission through their work on the Capital Markets Union. This is a European Commission initiative to mobilise capital in Europe. A main objective of which is to build a sustainable securitisation regime across the European Union. The Capital Markets Union specifically states how alternative sources of finance are more widely used in other parts of the world, and the widely held view is that should play a bigger role in providing financing to companies that struggle to get funding, especially SMEs and start-ups.

Flood Risk Insurance Cover Provision

156. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that houses that have not experienced flooding and are in areas that have not experienced flooding in more than 30 years following works are now being denied flood insurance cover, such as in an area (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the extent of the issue; if he will take measures to have the works carried out in the aforementioned area included on the memorandum of understanding between the OPW and an organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37977/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to home owners and businesses alike, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

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

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

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

Insurance Ireland has informed me that its members, since 1 June 2014, have factored data on all completed flood defence schemes, provided by the OPW, into its assessment of flood risk within these areas. This information has been provided as part of an information sharing arrangement entered into between OPW and Insurance Ireland (Memorandum of Understanding). The nature of this arrangement is such that it should lead to a greater availability of flood cover in previously higher risk areas, and at better prices.

While it is not possible for me to comment in detail on individual cases without the full facts, I am advised by the OPW that work was completed on the River Dodder Tidal Scheme, the details of which have been shared with the Insurance Industry. Work is continuing on the River Dodder phases C, D, & E and details of the defended area will also be shared with Insurance Ireland upon completion in line with the Memorandum of Understanding.

Separately, the Lower Dodder Road was mapped as part of the CFRAM study which identified only a limited risk of flooding at 1% event and no additional flood defences have been proposed.

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

Brexit Staff

157. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37992/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Assistant Secretary who heads the EU and International Division of my Department has been designated as the lead official in the Department for Brexit matters. A dedicated Brexit Unit within the EU and International Division was established in July 2016 to oversee and coordinate Brexit work across the entire Department and to act as a key liaison point, in particular with the Departments of the Taoiseach and of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are currently four staff in the dedicated unit which is led at Principal Officer level. Also, an additional staff member has been assigned to the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels specifically to deal with Brexit.

We have appointed lead Brexit coordinators at Principal Officer level across all divisions of the Department. The challenges which we face as a result of Brexit are mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning.

Brexit resourcing has been managed within existing the paybill allocation. We will continue to monitor the resources needed to respond to specific policy challenges on an ongoing basis.

Brexit Staff

158. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38008/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Assistant Secretary who heads the EU and International Division of my Department has been designated as the lead official in the Department for Brexit matters. A dedicated Brexit Unit within the EU and International Division was established in July 2016 to oversee and coordinate Brexit work across the entire Department and to act as a key liaison point, in particular with the Departments of the Taoiseach and of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are currently four staff in the dedicated unit which is led at Principal Officer level. Also, an additional staff member has been assigned to the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels specifically to deal with Brexit.

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Brexit resourcing has been managed within the existing pay bill allocation. We will continue to monitor the resources needed to respond to specific policy challenges on an ongoing basis.

Construction Costs

159. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38024/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department monitors inflation across the economy on an ongoing basis, including in the construction sector. For example, the National House Construction Cost Index, published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, provides an indication of labour and material cost developments within the construction industry. A number of construction sector organisations also conduct periodic assessments of construction costs in Ireland. For example, in May of last year, the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) published a report *The Real Cost of New House Delivery* which examined the component costs of housing delivery in the Dublin region.

As part of Rebuilding Ireland, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, detailed studies into construction costs are currently ongoing. A Working Group, chaired by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, has been established to work with industry representatives in order to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland. It is my understanding that the Housing Agency is also co-ordinating an independent review and analysis of delivery costs in Ireland. Both of these studies are due to be completed shortly.

With regards to the construction projects undertaken by my Department in the past 18 months, a project to update fire and electrical systems has recently been completed in offices shared by my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The programme was managed by the Office of Public Works. My Department made a fixed contribution to the total cost of the project.

Question No. 160 answered with Question No. 117.

Fiscal Policy

161. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the rainy day fund, as provided for in the summer economic statement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38034/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government outlined its position in relation to the rainy day fund (RDF) in the 2017 Summer Economic Statement (SES) which was published in July. The planned contribution to the RDF is now €500 million per annum, beginning in 2019 (on the assumption that the medium term objective is achieved next year). This is down from the €1 billion provisionally set out in the 2016 SES.

I will in due course be sending a consultation paper to the Oireachtas, seeking its views on a number of issues, such as the appropriate size of the fund, replenishment and, of course, the permitted uses of the fund.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 132.

State Banking Sector

163. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to sell additional stakes in a bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38037/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, as part of the IPO process earlier this year the State sold 28.75% of AIB's ordinary share capital at a price of €4.40 per share recouping over €3.4 billion for the State. The offering was strongly supported by a broad range of international institutional investors as well as Irish retail investors.

Following the IPO, the State's remaining shareholding in AIB is in a legal 'lock-up' period of 180 days. This is standard market practice. I therefore expect no further sale of AIB shares in 2017.

Officials in my Department will continue to monitor the performance of the bank, its share price and equity markets more generally to determine the next sensible opportunity to realise value from our investment. It is important to point out that exiting our full investment in AIB in a measured way that will optimise value, will take a number of years, but I believe that in time we will recoup all of the money we invested in the bank.

Under the policy set out in the 'Programme for a Partnership Government', any further sale of AIB shares contemplated before the end of 2018 would need to be approved by the Government.

European Investment Bank

164. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his Department's work with the European Investment Bank in Ireland in respect of infrastructure investment, SME finance and mitigation of the impact of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38039/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I met the EIB President, EIB Vice President Andrew McDowell and other representatives of the Bank in Luxembourg on 23-24 May in the second formal meeting of the general EIB Ireland Financing Group. There was a wide ranging discussion on the capital and infrastructural needs of the Irish economy and the key issues that arise in trying to address these needs. This discussion included the limited fiscal space with which the Government must operate, the potential threats posed by Brexit and the assessment of priorities for additional funding that is currently underway as part of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan.

At that meeting, it was agreed that the work of the Group, and its three sub-groups which met on a number of occasions earlier this year, should continue, while a number of specific action points were agreed for intensive follow-up engagement over the coming weeks and months:

- the Irish authorities and EIB are to explore potential financing options for delivering Metro North, drawing on EIB's knowledge and experience of financing similar projects in other countries.

- to engage in exploratory discussions in relation to EIB's knowledge and experience of different user-pay PPP or concession type models for delivering infrastructure projects but without prejudice to decisions on project selection that will only be taken by Government following completion of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan, or the review of policy in relation to the future use of PPPs or concessions that is currently under way as part of the mid-term review.

- to explore, partly in relation to mitigation of the impacts of Brexit on the Irish economy, the potential for EIB to become involved in funding measures to provide access to finance for the enterprise/agriculture sectors.

At the meeting, the EIB indicated that they were currently looking at products to assist Ireland in dealing with the threats of Brexit, especially in the Enterprise and SME sectors. I understand that this work is ongoing and that there is a good degree of engagement by the key stakeholders on exploring the possible mechanisms to deal with this issue.

Eurozone Issues

165. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with his ECOFIN colleagues regarding eurozone governance structures proposed by President Emmanuel Macron of France; if the matter will be discussed at the next ECOFIN meeting on 16 September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38040/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The proposals on future Eurozone governance structures as outlined by the French President are part of a wider debate that is taking place on the Future of Europe.

On 1 March 2017, the European Commission published a White Paper on the Future of Europe. As part of this White paper, the European Commission published five reflection papers on topics such as Globalisation, Future of EU Finances, the Social Dimension of the EU and the future of EU defence. One of these Reflection papers entitled, “The Reflection Paper on the Deepening of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)” was published on 31 May 2017 and contains a number of potential ideas for the future direction of the Economic and Monetary Union.

These potential ideas will be discussed at the Informal ECOFIN meeting taking place on 15-16 September in Tallinn which I will be attending.

Credit Union Lending

166. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the comments recently by a person (details supplied) regarding credit unions lending their reserves to approved housing bodies in view of the considerable funds credit unions have on deposit in banks here; his plans to ensure credit union deposits are put to a more productive use in the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38041/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My role as Minister for Finance is to ensure that the legal framework for credit unions is appropriate for the effective operation and supervision of credit unions.

The Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within its independent regulatory discretion, the Registrar acts to support the prudential soundness of individual credit unions, to maintain sector stability and to protect the savings of credit union members.

I have been informed by the Central Bank that in line with ensuring that regulations are kept up to date and appropriate, the Central Bank is reviewing the investment regulations for credit unions. This review is being undertaken in the context of the following legislative provisions:

- the Central Bank’s statutory mandate to regulate and supervise credit unions with a view

to ensuring the protection by each credit union of the funds of its members and the maintenance of the financial stability and well-being of credit unions generally;

- the objects of credit unions set out in the 1997 Act; and

- the legislative requirement, set out in section 43 of the 1997 Act, for credit unions to ensure investments do not involve undue risk to members' savings.

Under the existing regulations credit unions are permitted to invest in a range of specified investment classes which includes government securities, deposits and bank bonds and collective investment schemes made up of these instruments. Investments in these classes of investments are subject to specified maturity and concentration limits. The Central Bank is reviewing the regulations to consider whether it is appropriate and prudent to facilitate investment by credit unions in other investments, such as for example social housing, by broadening the permitted investment classes in the regulations.

Following this review of the investment framework for credit unions, the Central Bank published consultation paper 109 "Consultation on Potential Changes to the Investment Framework for Credit Unions" (CP109) on 11 May 2017. CP109 sets out potential changes to the investment framework for credit unions, along with a Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA), and sought views from credit unions and other sector stakeholders on the potential changes outlined, including the potential for credit unions to make investments in approved housing bodies.

If regulations provided for investment in social housing each individual credit union would be required to make an independent decision on whether or not it would provide such funding. Credit unions, in investing in long term investments, need to accommodate the short term nature of their funding (member deposits) and related asset liability matching and liquidity considerations. CP109 identified potential risk and risk mitigants for investments in approved housing bodies and asked for feedback on the appropriateness of credit unions undertaking such an investment. The consultation period closed on 28 June 2017 and the Central Bank has received 74 submissions from a broad range of respondents. The Central Bank will consider the entirety of the submissions received prior to finalising changes to the investment framework.

The Government recognises the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement in this country. The Government's priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall and it is determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement.

Tracker Mortgages Examination

167. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he has satisfied himself that the Central Bank's order to lending banks to return affected customers to an appropriate tracker rate of interest is being carried out; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that banks are free to come up with their own offers of compensation and that many banks are not offering customers effective redress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38042/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland published a report providing an update on the Examination of Tracker Mortgage Related Issues on 23 March last (<https://www.centralbank.ie/news-media/press-releases/update-report-tracker-mortgages>).

As set out in the report,

- approximately 9,900 customer accounts had been identified as impacted by lenders, as part of the Examination, as at end February 2017;

- lenders had commenced contacting impacted customers identified as at end February 2017 and had rectified the interest rates applied to such impacted customers' accounts, thus stopping further detriment (as at the date of the report, interest rates had been rectified on more than 90% of the accounts that require such rectification);

- to end February 2017, approximately €78m had been paid in redress and compensation to approximately 2,600 impacted customers identified as part of the Examination.

As also set out in the March report, the Central Bank invoked its powers under Section 22 of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act to set specific timelines for lenders to complete Phase 2 (the "Review Phase") of the Examination and in line with those timelines, it expects the vast majority of impacted customers to be identified by lenders by end September 2017.

The Central Bank does not have the statutory power to set compensation levels or to compel lenders to implement redress and compensation programmes in respect of failures that occurred prior to the introduction of the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013. However, as part of the Examination framework, where customer detriment is identified the Central Bank has clearly articulated its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to impacted customers in line with prescribed Principles for Redress. The Principles for Redress are designed to ensure that impacted customers receive appropriate redress and compensation in a timely manner.

Key elements of the Central Bank's expectations in respect of redress and compensation for impacted customers include:

- any harm is stopped at the earliest possible time after each group of impacted customers is identified;

- the interest rates applied to impacted customers' accounts revert to the appropriate tracker interest rate or impacted customers are given the opportunity to revert to such a rate where relevant;

- redress will be provided to impacted customers to return them to the position they would have been in had lenders' failures not occurred;

- reasonable compensation, that reflects the detriment suffered by individual customers, is provided;

- redress and compensation is to be paid to impacted customers up front at the point of offer and compensation cannot be reduced by virtue of a customer lodging an appeal; and

- an additional payment is to be provided to impacted customers at the point of offer to enable them to take independent professional advice regarding the redress and compensation offers made to them.

As the Examination continues to progress, the Central Bank continues to challenge the position a lender has taken in relation to particular groups of customers to ensure the fair treatment of tracker mortgage customers.

The Examination Framework also provides that lenders should establish an independent appeals process to deal with customers who are dissatisfied with any aspect of the redress and

compensation offers that they receive from lenders in respect of these matters. As the Principles for Redress provide that all redress and compensation payments are made to customers on an up-front basis, customers can accept the redress and compensation offered and still make an appeal. In addition, the impacted customer has the option of bringing a complaint to the FSO or initiating court proceedings.

The Central Bank also advises that a further update report on the Examination will be issued later in the autumn.

Consumer Protection

168. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that mortgage holders, tenants and SMEs that have loans or credit from non-bank lenders or vulture funds are fully protected; if he will consider extending the provisions of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38043/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act, 2015 was enacted in July 2015. It was introduced by the previous Government to fill the consumer protection gap where loans were sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. The Act introduced a regulatory regime for a new type of entity called a ‘credit servicing firm’. Credit Servicing Firms are now subject to the provisions of Irish financial services law that apply to ‘regulated financial service providers’.

Under the Act, purchasers of loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm that is regulated by the Central Bank. The significant point is that the regulation is focussed at the point of contact with the customer. Therefore relevant borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation in July 2016. It is also important to highlight that the transfer of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower’s rights and obligations under the original contract.

The Central Bank of Ireland’s SME Lending Regulations (the Regulations) came into effect and apply to regulated entities from 1 July last, except for credit unions who are required to comply since 1 January 2017. The Regulations aim to strengthen protections for SMEs from the existing SME Code in place, while also facilitating access to credit by introducing specific new additional requirements that regulated lenders must comply with.

The Regulations introduce specific requirements for regulated lenders (and credit servicing firms where relevant), including:

- Giving SME borrowers greater transparency around the application process;
- Providing SME borrowers with reasons for declining credit, in writing, that are specific to their application;
- Providing greater protections for guarantors;
- Contacting SME borrowers who have been in arrears for 15 working days;

- Warning SME borrowers if they are in danger of being classified as not co-operating; and
- Expanding the grounds for appeal and setting up an internal appeals panel.

The Central Bank has published a short guide for SMEs and guarantors on the protections available for them under the Regulations which is available on the Central Bank website.

The SME Regulations apply to all regulated financial services providers providing credit to SMEs in Ireland. By virtue of the Credit Servicing Act, this means these protections also apply where the loan was granted by a regulated entity but has since been transferred to an unregulated entity, and is being serviced by a credit servicing firm.

I would highlight that tenant relations are governed by multiple pieces of legislation mainly under the aegis of my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

My Department will continue to keep all relevant legislation under review in order to ensure that borrowers whose loans have been sold are properly protected and do not lose any protections that they previously enjoyed. In addition, the Department of Finance expects that the Central Bank, as regulator of credit servicing firms, will be vigilant in this area and raise any specific instances where they have found consumers have not had their protections upheld or that their positions have been disadvantaged.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

169. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the funding that has been made available through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund for social and affordable housing provision; if he has satisfied himself with the rates of interest being charged to borrowers through the fund; if he is reviewing the operation of the mechanisms through which credit is accessed from the fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38044/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTMA has informed me that in line with its statutory mandate, the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) is examining opportunities for investments that have the potential to support increased supply of housing. These include near-term pipeline housing projects in the build-to-rent sector and student accommodation along with investments in housing-related enabling infrastructure.

To date the Fund has committed more than €360 million across investments in Activate Capital, Ardstone Residential Partnership and Bancroft. Additionally the fund has invested a further €150 million in more general property investments. In the area of social and affordable housing the fund has invested in the DAD Property Fund Ltd who recently purchased 131 apartments in the New Bancroft Hall apartment block in Tallaght. The operation of the apartment block will comprise an element of social and affordable housing, alongside the open-market rental component.

The interest rate charged to borrowers must meet the risk-adjusted commercial return requirement of ISIF's "double bottom line" mandate. Therefore, the interest rate applied to any individual debt financing arrangement relates to the level of risk and other investment factors in the underlying proposal.

The Fund is continuing to examine the feasibility of an 'off-balance' sheet mechanism to facilitate investment in social housing, while also considering any initiatives which cumulatively can make a contribution to increased housing output.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

170. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he has asked the Central Bank to procure an independent assessment of the arrears and negative equity loan books of the banks in view of the recent programme for Government commitment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38045/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that the Central Bank has an ongoing role in monitoring the level of arrears and negative equity on mortgages. The Programme for a Partnership Government contains a range of commitments in the broad housing and banking area and my Department regularly engages with the Central Bank on all the Programme for Government Commitments which will impact on the Central Bank and its role in relation to mortgages.

In this context, at the end of 2016 the Central Bank produced a report on mortgage arrears:-

(<http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CBI-Mortgage-Arrears-Report-FINAL.pdf>). That report provides a detailed assessment of mortgage arrears in banks and non-bank entities and includes analysis on mortgage restructuring activity and the range of solutions offered that may affect borrowers' capacity to remain in their primary residence. The report notes that progress on mortgage arrears is well established and clearly moving in the right direction.

This downward trend in mortgage arrears has been maintained and the most recent Central Bank data in respect of the first quarter of 2017:-

(https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/mortgage-arrears/2017q1_ie_mortgage_arrears_statisticse2a9c-5134644629bacc1ff0000269695.pdf?sfvrsn=8) indicates that 53,100 primary dwelling mortgage accounts (7.2% of total) are more than 90 days in arrears. This represents the fourteenth consecutive quarterly decline in this key arrears indicator. In terms of negative equity, table 7 of the most recent Central Bank's Household Credit Market Report (<https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/household-credit-market-report/household-credit-market-report-2017h1.pdf?sfvrsn=2>) estimates that 12 per cent of PDH loans were in negative equity as of June 2016. The number of mortgages in negative equity (most of which are performing) have been reducing and this has important implications for the wider economy such as improving mobility amongst those affected, potential greater spend on home improvements and maintenance, and increased consumption via the wealth effect.

Corporation Tax

171. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the European Commission to make a final report on the tax affairs of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38046/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Commission published the Final Decision in the Apple State aid case in December 2016.

This was sent to Ireland at the end of August 2016.

Ireland does not accept the Commission's analysis and the State has lodged an application with the General Court of the European Union to annul the whole Decision.

It will likely be several years before the matter is ultimately settled by the European Courts.

European Investment Bank

172. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions his Department has had with the European Investment Bank and other Departments to establish an off-balance sheet special purpose vehicle to draw down funding from the EIB to facilitate large scale mixed social and private residential development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38047/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and the wider NTMA are continuing to examine the feasibility of establishing a funding vehicle, in conjunction with the private sector, which could facilitate investment in social and affordable housing. The objective is to assess the feasibility of an ‘off-balance’ mechanism to facilitate investment in social housing which is additional to that being provided directly by the State and which does not impact on the General Government Balance.

Important preparatory work has been completed by ISIF in conjunction with my Department, the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, CSO and EUROSTAT. As part of this process there have been clarifications on the balance sheet treatment of such a fund through discussions with EUROSTAT, the CSO and the EIB.

Further detailed work is on-going in ISIF in relation to the commercial viability of such a fund and in terms of identifying investable private sector opportunities and platforms to deliver on the potential in this area.

Initial discussions with the EIB have taken place, and these have explored possible EIB participation in funding the housing model. These initial discussions indicate that the EIB is interested in supporting a housing model. Attention is now focused on developing a model which meets the off-balance sheet requirements, and one in which the EIB might participate.

Question No. 173 answered with Question No. 132.

Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base Proposals

174. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions has he had with his ECOFIN colleagues in view of the recent developments in respect of the common consolidated tax base; the steps he has taken in the interests of protecting Ireland’s tax sovereignty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38050/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Commission’s proposal for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) was published in October 2016 and discussed at the November 2016 ECOFIN meeting where initial impressions of the proposal were exchanged. At the December 2016 ECOFIN, Council Conclusions were approved in respect of the Commission’s wider package which included the CCCTB proposal but there was no specific discussion of the proposal at that meeting.

Since my appointment as Minister for Finance, I attended the June and July ECOFIN meetings where CCCTB was not on the agenda and was not specifically discussed.

The CCCTB is a complex and detailed proposal and Member States need to analyse fully its potential impact on national tax systems. Member States have begun to discuss and debate

the various aspects of the proposal in the relevant tax working parties. Ireland is engaging constructively in these discussions while continuing to assess whether it is in line with our long-term interests.

Member States maintain full sovereignty on tax matters and unanimity is required before any proposal can be agreed.

Research and Development Supports

175. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the steps his Department and the Revenue Commissioners have taken to address problems experienced by SMEs in applying for the research and development tax credit and the administrative burdens associated with it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38051/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are a number of elements of R&D tax credit regime which are of particular assistance to SMEs. These include the refundable element of the credit which helps cash-flow; the key employee provision to help them to attract talent; the removal of the base year in 2015; and generous limits on outsourcing.

Revenue has taken a number of steps to assist companies in making claims for the R&D tax credit:

- In 2015 Revenue published revised guidance which addressed issues Revenue was encountering on audits of claims for the R&D credit. Following on from the publication of that guidance, Revenue has presented at conferences around the country (such as the Industry Research & Development Group conferences which are attended by companies, advisors and educators), building awareness of the R&D tax credit and the common issues that arise.

- In February 2017 Revenue issued guidance aimed specifically at micro and small companies. The aim of this new guidance was to give these smaller companies greater clarity on how they could show to Revenue that their R&D tax credit claim satisfied the “science test”.

- In February 2017 Revenue also issued guidance which aimed to provide greater transparency on the appointment and use of independent experts in Revenue reviews of R&D tax credit claims.

Tax Code

176. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding his Department’s study to amalgamate PRSI and USC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38052/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have stated on a number of occasions that my long-term view of the USC is to see its amalgamation with the existing PRSI system. In this context, a guiding principle will be a focus on reducing the income tax burden in a way that is both affordable and sustainable.

I have asked my officials to examine policy options with regard to the amalgamation of USC and PRSI. This will take some time in conjunction with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The process will require an examination of what is likely to be a considerable re-working of the underpinning systems. The Universal Social Charge is a tax on income, whereas PRSI is a social insurance which generally confers rights to certain social

welfare benefits when the necessary number of contributions have been made. The Deputy may be aware that the Income Tax and Universal Social Charge paper prepared for the Tax Strategy Group this July contained information on the potential advantages of a simplification of the personal tax system via an amalgamation of USC and PRSI, along with details of some of the policy considerations that would need to be addressed. This paper has been published on my Department's website and is available at: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/TSG-17-02-Income-Tax-and-USC-paper-FINAL-JC.pdf>

Changes to USC and/or PRSI will form part of the ongoing wider medium-term process of income tax reform which is likely to take a number of Budgets to deliver. High marginal tax rates discourage work and increase costs to employers and therefore have a negative impact on both productivity and international competitiveness. This is a time when we need to concentrate on improving our competitiveness, to continue the increases in employment and opportunities for our citizens. It should be possible, as part of the medium-term reform process, to preserve aspects of the USC which are most beneficial to the long-term sustainability of our tax revenues, such as the wider tax base, while still achieving a growth-friendly simplification of the overall personal tax system.

Credit Union Advisory Committee

177. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the progress his Department has made in the establishment of the Credit Union Advisory Committee; when the first meeting of the implementation group will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38053/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) in its Review of Implementation of the Recommendations in the Commission on Credit Unions Report (CUAC Report) recommended the establishment of an Implementation Group for a specified period of time. As previously referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 196 on 4 April 2017 and Parliamentary Question No. 74 on 18 May 2017, the Implementation Group has been established to oversee and monitor implementation of CUAC's recommendations in a methodical manner and to advise the Minister for Finance on progress. To date, the Implementation Group has met seven times.

Publication of CUAC's Report in July 2016 was just the beginning of the process. From September 2016 onwards, CUAC continued working on enabling a coherent implementation plan be devised with the Department working closely with CUAC on this.

In line with CUAC's recommendations, the Department invited one nominee from each of the stakeholder groups to sit on the Implementation Group. The Implementation Group consists of a representative from each of: Irish League of Credit Unions; Credit Union Development Association; Credit Union Managers' Association; National Supervisors Forum; and the Central Bank. The Implementation Group also has a CUAC representative and is chaired by the Department of Finance. This broad membership ensures participation and encourages contribution from all credit union perspectives.

The Implementation Group held seven meetings from February to September 2017. These meetings were also attended by CUAC members. It is intended that each CUAC recommendation will be addressed separately with a view to implementation at the appropriate time. Meetings will continue to take place on a monthly basis with the next meeting scheduled for early October 2017. A number of discussion papers have been developed by the Implementation Group with the focus very much on implementing the recommendations at the appropriate

time and in the most effective manner. The term of the Implementation Group is for one year which may be extended at the discretion of the Minister.

I look forward to receiving regular progress reports on implementation of these very important recommendations.

Credit Union Services

178. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the progress his Department has made with the Central Bank on the request by a number of credit unions to expand their debit card and mortgage services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38054/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As previously referred to in Parliamentary Question Nos. 197 on 4 April 2017 and 75 on 18 May 2017, the Credit Union Act, 1997 (1997 Act) sets out the services that a credit union may provide to its members. In addition, the Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016 (2016 Regulations) provides for services exempt from additional services requirements. Where a credit union wishes to provide services to its members, other than those services that are provided for under the 1997 Act or the list of services exempt from the additional services requirements set out in the 2016 Regulations, an application may be made to the Central Bank for approval to provide such additional services, in accordance with the provisions in sections 48-52 of the 1997 Act.

Debit card provision (and the necessary underlying payment account service) is an additional service and as such requires Central Bank approval. The Member Personal Current Account Services (MPCAS) which provides for a current account and a range of services, including payment instruments such as debit cards, has been available to eligible credit unions since October 2016. Six credit unions have been approved for this service which is granted under additional services provisions (sections 48 to 52) within the Credit Union Act 1997 (as amended).

I am informed that there has been substantial interest in this service from eligible credit unions and the Central Bank is currently processing a significant number of applications. The service approval provides for a shared services support, to bridge necessary technical expertise and scale considerations. It is expected that once MPCAS is fully established and embedded, it is likely to be available to smaller credit unions with necessary risk understanding. Details of MPCAS and the approval process, along with the application requirements and related guidance are on the Central Bank's website. The Central Bank has also indicated it is open to applications for alternative debit card proposals and recommends the MPCAS framework as a template for such alternative proposals.

Currently credit unions can, and some do, provide mortgages to members. These type of loans are subject to certain maturity limits contained in the 2016 Regulations. Those Regulations set out the percentage of a credit union's loan book that can be outstanding for periods exceeding both five years and ten years, as well as limits on the maximum outstanding liability to an individual member. Under the 2016 Regulations credit unions continue to be allowed to lend up to 30% of their loan book over five years and up to 10% of their loan book over 10 years, subject to a maximum maturity of 25 years. In addition, credit unions can apply to the Central Bank for an extension to their longer term lending limits (up to 40% of their loan book over 5 years and up to 15% of their loan book over 10 years). Approval is subject to conditions set by the Central Bank. 14 credit unions are currently approved to avail of increased longer term lending limits.

The Central Bank has indicated that it can see longer term lending, including mortgages, as

part of a balanced portfolio of total lending. However, in their analyses, credit unions need to consider the impact of longer term lending on interest margins, return on assets and on balance sheet structure – the issue of funding longer term lending with short term funding is a challenge for the credit union business model. The Central Bank further informs me that consumer mortgage lending is an activity that has its own unique risk profile, and proposals to become involved in mortgage lending in a significant way must be supported by an evidence based business case.

The Registry of Credit unions is currently developing a paper on key risk considerations for credit unions intending to engage in longer term lending/mortgages, to support their understanding of the nature of risks involved and provide a degree of clarity on minimum expectations.

The Credit Union Advisory Committee's (CUAC) recent report provides a number of recommendations, one of which is to conduct a full review of lending limits. An Implementation Group has been established in this Department, which has met on seven occasions and is currently assessing each of CUAC's recommendations with a view to implementing as appropriate. Central to its work is ensuring a full examination of lending limits and concentration limits is carried out as recommended. I look forward to regular progress reports from the Implementation Group as these recommendations are developed and implemented.

Banking Sector

179. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the recent publicity regarding an organisation's (details supplied) work regarding the establishment of a public banking network here; if the organisation invited officials from his Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development to participate in a field trip to Germany to examine the public banking network there; the technical assistance the organisation offered the Government in respect of the establishment of a public banking network here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38055/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for Government commits the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) and the Department of Finance to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions. Responsibility for this commitment has now moved from the DAHRRGA to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

A project team with officials from both departments was assembled in early 2017 to investigate the Sparkassen model and other models of local public banking and bring forward a report to both the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D., and myself. I understand that this report is near completion and will be published in due course. It will set out the Irish banking context as well as analysing the responses to the consultation on public banking and its applicability in Ireland. It will then set out the findings and conclusions of the investigation of the Sparkassen model and other models of local public banking.

There has been a consultation process as part of this investigation of local public banking. This consultation involved engagement with stakeholders and interested parties, including the Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation (SBFIC), the international development wing of the Sparkassen movement. Officials from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Finance met with representatives from SBFIC, who gave a detailed presentation, including a written proposal, on the Sparkassen model.

The purpose of the consultation process and subsequent report that is being prepared is to assist in the analysis of the applicability and viability of the Sparkassen model of local public banking in an Irish context.

Stamp Duty

180. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the specific information that is recorded by the Revenue Commissioners in respect of stamp duty returns that are filed with it in respect of the transfer of residential land and other land. [38106/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the information listed in the below Tables is the information that persons filing Stamp Duty returns are asked to supply in respect of the transfer (including long term and short term leases) of residential and non-residential land. The actual information supplied depends on the content of the document of conveyance/transfer or lease. All information supplied is recorded by Revenue.

Table 1: Information which filers of Stamp Duty returns are asked to supply in the case of documents of conveyance/transfer and long term leases (a lease for a term greater than 100 years) of Residential Land

Documents of Conveyance/Transfer and Long Term Leases of Residential Land	New Dwelling House/Apartment	Second-hand Dwelling House/Apartment	Curtilage of Residential Land/Ground Rent
Tax Reference No. of Filer	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Tax Reference No. of each party to the document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Where applicable, the name(s) of any person(s) acting in a fiduciary capacity (e.g. Trustee/Legal Personal Representative/Nominee) on behalf of any party to the document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Date of execution of document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Date of related contract	Optional	Optional	Optional
Date document released from escrow	Optional	Optional	Optional

Documents of Conveyance/Transfer and Long Term Leases of Residential Land	New Dwelling House/Apartment	Second-hand Dwelling House/Apartment	Curtilage of Residential Land/Ground Rent
Total number of Residential Properties/Units being transferred in the document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory - but where 0 (zero) is input the Type of Property will default to Curtilage/Ground Rent at a later screen.
LPT Property ID/Property Address	LPT Property ID is optional - but where LPT Property ID is not provided the address details including County and relevant Local Authority must be provided	LPT Property ID is Mandatory. Once input, the address of the property automatically populates on the e-Stamping return.	Address details Mandatory
Folio Number(s)	Optional	Optional	Optional
Type of contract	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Floor area of property	Mandatory	Optional	N/A
Purchaser Information (i.e. owner/occupier, non-owner/occupier, first time buyer owner/occupier)	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
If purchaser of property is a Local Authority	Optional	N/A	N/A
The relationship, if any, between the parties to the document (e.g. spouses/associated companies)	Optional	Optional	Optional
Interest being transferred less than the full interest in the property (e.g. transfer from parent to parent and child)	Optional	Optional	Optional
Term of lease in years (only applicable to Long Term Leases)	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory

Documents of Conveyance/Transfer and Long Term Leases of Residential Land	New Dwelling House/Apartment	Second-hand Dwelling House/Apartment	Curtilage of Residential Land/Ground Rent
Average Annual Rent (only applicable to Long Term Leases)	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
If there is a Rent Review Clause included in lease (only applicable to Long Term Leases)	Optional	Optional	Optional
Consideration paid and/or open market value in case of gift or partial gift	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Stamp Duty Relief/Exemption claimed	Optional	Optional	Optional

Table 2: Information which filers of Stamp Duty returns are asked to supply in the case of documents of conveyance/transfer and Long Term Leases (leases for a term greater than 100 years) of Non-Residential Land

Document of conveyance/transfer and Long Term Lease of Non-Residential land	Site Only	Agricultural land	Non-Agricultural land	New and Second-hand Commercial/Industrial Premises
Tax Reference No. of Filer	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Tax Reference No. of each party to the document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Where applicable, the name(s) of any person(s) acting in a fiduciary capacity (e.g. Trustee/Legal Personal Representative/Nominee) on behalf of any party to the document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory

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Document of conveyance/ transfer and Long Term Lease of Non-Residential land	Site Only	Agricultural land	Non-Agricultural land	New and Second-hand Commercial/Industrial Premises
Date of execution of Document	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Date document released from escrow	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Date of related contract	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Property Address including County details	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Folio Number(s)	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Type of contract	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Land area (Hectares)	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Optional
The relationship If any between the parties to the document (e.g. spouses, associated companies)	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Interest being transferred less than the full interest in the property (e.g. transfer from parent to parent and child)	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional
Term of lease in years (only applicable to Long Term Leases)	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Average Annual Rent (only applicable to Long Term Leases)	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
If there is a Rent Review Clause included in lease (only applicable to Long Term Leases)	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional

Document of conveyance/ transfer and Long Term Lease of Non-Residential land	Site Only	Agricultural land	Non-Agricultural land	New and Second-hand Commercial/Industrial Premises
Consideration paid and/or open market value in case of gift or partial gift	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
Stamp Duty Relief/Exemption claimed	Optional	Optional	Optional	Optional

Table 3: Information which filers of Stamp Duty returns are asked to supply in the case of Short Term Leases (leases for a period less than or equal to 100 years) of Residential and Non-Residential Land

Short Term Lease	Residential Land	Non-Residential Land
Tax Reference No. of Filer	Mandatory	Mandatory
Tax Reference No. of each party to the document	Mandatory	Mandatory
Where applicable, the name(s) of any person(s) acting in a fiduciary capacity (e.g. Trustee/Legal Personal Representative/Nominee) on behalf of any party to the document	Mandatory	Mandatory
Date of execution of document	Mandatory	Mandatory
Date document released from escrow	Optional	Optional
Date of related contract	Optional	Optional
Property Address including County details	Mandatory	Mandatory
The relationship If any between the parties to the document (e.g. spouses, associated companies)	Optional	Optional
Term of Lease in years and months	Mandatory	Mandatory
If there is a Rent Review Clause included in lease	Optional	Optional
If lease includes the payment of a premium	Optional	Optional

Short Term Lease	Residential Land	Non-Residential Land
Average Annual Rent and/or open market rent in the case of a gift	Mandatory	Mandatory
Stamp Duty Relief/Exemption claimed	Optional	Optional

Question No. 181 answered with Question No. 130.

Property Tax Exemptions

182. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the number of local property tax exemptions in each local authority; and the reason for each exemption for 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38123/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the number of Local Property Tax (LPT) exemptions in each Local Authority is as outlined in the table below for the 2016 liability year. Data for 2017 is at present highly provisional and stable figures will not be available until year end. The rationale for each exemption and the eligibility criteria is documented at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/property/local-property-tax/index.aspx>.

Number of LPT Exemptions for 2016 by Local Authority

	Property purchased as a home in 2013	New and previously unused between 1/1/2013 - 31/10/2019	Long-term illness	Charity/Public Body owned for special needs	Unsold by builder/developer	Residence of a severely incapacitated individual	Fully subject to Commercial rates	Charitable recreational activities
Carlow	109	79	70	95	174	21	23	<10
Cavan	145	103	109	189	247	32	46	<10
Clare	211	128	209	215	350	64	59	<10
Cork City	274	99	286	422	257	40	59	<10
Cork County	974	491	622	1,002	937	147	248	21
Donegal	198	172	214	354	281	65	68	<10
Dublin City	1,768	481	999	2,125	870	216	338	38
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	975	387	326	252	244	67	60	12
Fingal	923	349	155	257	191	88	57	<10
Galway City	170	47	74	113	29	23	32	<10
Galway County	386	237	294	346	265	53	102	12
Kerry	247	178	319	324	275	59	133	<10
Kildare	553	243	161	255	166	78	54	20
Kilkenny	167	75	133	335	85	39	60	<10
Laois	143	76	105	157	140	31	20	<10
Leitrim	106	49	92	70	202	12	12	<10

Limerick City and County	316	153	339	705	179	95	89	10
Longford	88	55	82	96	54	12	23	<10
Louth	255	113	184	222	137	52	57	<10
Mayo	236	163	281	408	208	43	80	18
Meath	401	165	167	221	164	77	52	11
Monaghan	73	58	111	142	118	22	27	<10
Offaly	139	54	122	124	133	26	34	10
Roscommon	188	93	168	86	110	27	31	<10
Sligo	136	86	143	209	191	31	39	<10
South Dublin	729	288	213	275	115	107	81	<10
Tipperary	268	151	267	478	185	79	122	<10
Waterford City and County	214	102	231	620	124	63	61	<10
Westmeath	160	89	159	89	58	27	46	<10
Wexford	327	262	228	231	254	60	72	<10
Wicklow	451	160	201	194	66	66	66	<10
Total	11,330	5,186	7,064	10,611	6,809	1,822	2,251	226

table cont.

	Fully subject to Commercial rates	Charitable recreational activities	Nursing homes	Mobile homes	Pyrite damaged	Diplomatic properties	Unfinished Housing Estates	Total
Carlow	23	<10	<10	<10	0	0	73	656
Cavan	46	<10	<10	<10	0	0	71	960
Clare	59	<10	<10	<10	0	0	54	1,310
Cork City	59	<10	11	<10	0	0	<10	1,460
Cork County	248	21	32	21	0	0	289	4,784
Donegal	68	<10	<10	21	<10	0	300	1,681
Dublin City	338	38	68	<10	102	<10	129	7,143
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	60	12	11	<10	<10	<10	<10	2,345
Fingal	57	<10	<10	12	386	0	<10	2,430
Galway City	32	<10	<10	<10	0	0	<10	497
Galway County	102	12	13	<10	0	0	57	1,774
Kerry	133	<10	<10	<10	0	0	240	1,795
Kildare	54	20	<10	<10	46	0	178	1,765

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Kilkenny	60	<10	<10	<10	0	0	11	911
Laois	20	<10	<10	<10	0	0	58	743
Leitrim	12	<10	<10	<10	0	0	71	620
Limerick City and County	89	10	<10	<10	0	0	34	1,943
Longford	23	<10	<10	<10	<10	0	209	628
Louth	57	<10	<10	<10	0	0	114	1,144
Mayo	80	18	<10	<10	0	0	25	1,475
Meath	52	11	<10	51	118	0	62	1,495
Monaghan	27	<10	<10	<10	0	0	23	581
Offaly	34	10	<10	12	<10	0	<10	670
Roscommon	31	<10	10	<10	0	0	99	818
Sligo	39	<10	<10	<10	0	0	149	993
South Dublin	81	<10	<10	<10	<10	0	14	1,845
Tipperary	122	<10	<10	<10	0	0	292	1,857
Waterford City and County	61	<10	<10	<10	<10	0	151	1,579
Westmeath	46	<10	<10	<10	0	0	112	760
Wexford	72	<10	10	14	<10	0	208	1,671
Wicklow	66	<10	<10	25	0	<10	50	1,290
Total	2,251	226	267	287	670	<10	3,093	49,623

Note: Entries marked as “<10” feature small numbers of cases and are suppressed for confidentiality reasons. Local Authority owned properties are excluded.

Public Services Card

183. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if the bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependant on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38148/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department (Department of Finance) has no plans to make services or payments dependent on mandatory use and production of the public services card.

With respect to the eighteen bodies under the aegis of my Department, I have been advised that seventeen have no plans to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card.

In line with Government policy to develop a single authentication mechanism for customers to access public services and to get their due entitlements, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners is in discussion with the Department of Social Protection and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer about how such a mechanism can be utilised by customers of its myAccount service. Revenue’s myAccount is a secure online service which can be accessed

by customers using their PPS number and a Revenue issued password or, alternatively if they have a verified MyGovID account (which is administered by the Department of Social Protection and is linked to the Public Services Card), customers can use their MyGovID details. A transition to authentication via MyGovID will be introduced on a phased basis, starting with individuals taking up employment for the first time.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Eligibility

184. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review a specific scheme whereby persons that have retired and are not paying income tax are not eligible to avail of the scheme (details supplied). [38160/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) provides a tax relief by way of an income tax credit on repair, renovation or improvements works on principal private residences or rental properties carried out by tax compliant contractors. HRI came into operation on 25 October 2013, with rental properties being brought within its scope from 15 October 2014. The scheme is scheduled to run until 31 December 2018.

The incentive is already available to all taxpayers, including pensioners, but as is the nature of tax-based incentive schemes, the taxpayer in question needs to have a sufficient tax liability to obtain the benefit of the additional tax credit. As the Deputy will be aware, those aged 65 and over are treated more favourably by the tax system with the availability of additional tax credits and increased exemption limits, which can act to reduce or nullify any tax liability.

The development of a similar measure that would benefit old-age pensioners who are outside the income tax net would involve direct expenditure; this would likely be outside the ambit of my Department’s vote.

Tax Code

185. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether it is appropriate to charge VAT on carbon tax and the PSO levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38188/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): VAT is governed by the EU VAT Directive, with which Irish VAT law must comply. Article 78 of the VAT Directive provides that the taxable amount shall include “taxes, duties, levies and charges, excluding the VAT itself”. The amount on which VAT is chargeable, in accordance with section 37(1) of the Value-Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010, is the total consideration receivable by the supplier, “including all taxes, commissions, costs and charges whatsoever” but not including the VAT itself.

In this respect, in the case of a gas bill, which includes carbon tax, VAT law dictates that VAT should be calculated on the carbon tax element of the bill as well as the charge for the service. Similarly, where an electricity bill includes the PSO levy, VAT is charged on the full amount of the charge to the customer, which includes the PSO levy. The same situation applies in the case of other excises, including for example excises on petrol, auto-diesel, tobacco and alcohol products, where the VAT charged on these goods is also charged on the excise value.

Guidance in relation to the VAT treatment of the total consideration receivable by a supplier is set out in the VAT Guide. This publication is available on the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie.

Question No. 186 answered with Question No. 151.

Motor Insurance Costs

187. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking to ensure that drivers will see significant motor insurance premiums reductions in view of the fact that motor insurance companies are currently returning profits and that motor insurance premiums have increased excessively particularly in the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38200/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, the Deputy should note that as Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, have the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing of insurance products. Indeed, the EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks. These are considered by insurance companies on a case-by-case basis.

In relation to the profit levels of companies providing motor insurance, the Deputy may wish to note that the profitability of the sector is discussed in Chapter 3 of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, which was published by the Cost of Insurance Working Group in January 2017. The Report highlights that the industry made substantial profits between 2005 and 2008 (€2.2bn, of which approximately €1bn related to motor insurance). However, during the period from 2009 to 2015, there were underwriting losses of €1.3bn, with motor insurance accounting for €900m of this. It should also be noted that the low interest rate environment has materially affected the levels of interest or investment income which insurers can earn and has reduced their ability to compensate in part for their underwriting losses.

Therefore, notwithstanding the recent return to profitability for certain companies in the sector, the issue of profitability has been problematic for the industry over the previous number of years, and was a contributory factor to the general price increases experienced by consumers during that time.

As you are aware, this problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016. The Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are set out in an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The second such update was published on the Department's website on 21 July 2017 and shows the progress to date on the overall implementation of the recommendations, with a particular focus on the 17 action points which were due for completion in the second quarter of 2017. All 17 of these action points have been completed by their deadline. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as "ongoing". The third quarterly update will issue in the coming weeks.

I believe that the implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums over the next 18 months. It is envisaged that

the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, will achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for consumers. I also believe that the Setanta judgment, by finding that MIBI is not liable to meet third party claims, removes a major uncertainty from industry, which I would expect to be reflected in pricing in the short to medium term.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for August) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have reduced by 14% year-on-year. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore there are many people who may still be seeing increases. I am hopeful that greater stability in pricing will continue to occur, and that premiums will continue to fall from the very high level of last year.

Motor Tax

188. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reduce the rate of VRT on motorhomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38238/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Motorhomes are classed as Category B vehicles and therefore are subject to a rate of VRT of 13.3% of their Open Market Selling Price (OMSP). This compares to Category A (passenger) vehicles which are charged at rates between 14% and 36% of their OMSP depending on the level of CO2 they emit.

There are a number of objectives of the Irish Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) system. VRT is an important source of revenue for the State. It also seeks to reflect the negative externalities caused by using the vehicle in the State. These externalities are the costs to society and to the environment that, without the tax, would not otherwise be reflected in the price of the vehicle and for which the consumer would not otherwise have to pay.

In the case of motor vehicles, these include environment externalities such as air pollution, which is why one of the bases for imposing VRT is the vehicle's carbon emissions. Other externalities which VRT seeks to reflect, include the costs to society of providing and maintaining the road infrastructure, traffic control, relevant emergency services, and vehicle registration and licensing. The funds raised through VRT go towards compensating the Irish State for these significant costs.

Bank Codes of Conduct

189. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if it is Central Bank policy that the banks should record all telephone conversations between members of staff and the banks' customers; the current policy of banks (details supplied) in this regard; the length of time such recordings should be retained for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38248/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears Provides that "A lender must maintain recordings of all Arrears Support Unit telephone calls made to or from a borrower in relation to his/her arrears or pre-arrears." and that "All records required by, and demonstrating compliance with this Code, must be retained by the lender for six years. In addition, all records relating to a borrower must be retained for six years from the date the relationship with the borrower ends."

I understand that it is KBC Bank Ireland's policy to record business transactions carried out on the telephone which create a verbal contract. Customers are advised that calls may be recorded for quality and training purposes. It is the Bank's policy to provide customers with a copy of such voice recordings where requested.

I understand that calls between staff and customers at AIB are recorded in certain business areas depending on business need or business requirement (e.g. Call centres, dealing rooms) or where there is a regulatory requirement (for example under the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears). In general and particularly where there is a regulatory requirement, calls are retained for six years and in some circumstances, for six years from the date the relationship with a borrower ends or if the provision of any product or service to the consumer concerned is ceased.

I have been informed by Bank of Ireland that it adheres to the Consumer Protection Code and the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears which set out certain requirements for lenders – including Bank of Ireland – in relation to the recording of customer telephone calls.

Ulster Bank has informed me that where the bank records telephone conversations between its customers and the bank, these recordings are held for the period required under the relevant legislation (e.g. Data Protection, Codes of Conduct and Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears). The bank also informed me that not all calls are recorded for example if a consumer calls an advisor on their mobile, the call is not recorded.

Permanent TSB have informed me that the bank has policies in place to ensure that their regulatory obligations (e.g. Consumer Protection Code/Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) requiring the recording of telephone conversations with certain customers are met. The Bank may record conversations with customers for training and quality purposes. Telephone recordings are primarily focused on areas of the bank where service through face to face customer contact is not available. These areas include Permanent TSB's Telephone Banking Service and its Arrears Support Unit.

I should also add that the Financial Services Ombudsman has informed me that recordings of telephone conversations relevant to a dispute between a customer and their financial service provider can provide very useful, objective contemporaneous evidence for him when investigating and adjudicating complaints.

On the issue more generally, the Central Banks has informed me that the Bank's Consumer Protection Code 2012 (the Code) does not require regulated entities, including banks, to record all telephone calls with customers. However, Provision 3.44 of the Code provides that when making telephone contact in accordance with the Code, the representative of a regulated entity must inform the consumer that the telephone contact is being recorded, if this is the case. Chapter 11 of the Code sets out the record keeping requirements regulated entities must comply with in respect of regulated activities within scope of the Code.

Provision 11.5 states that a regulated entity must maintain up-to-date records containing "all correspondence with the consumer and details of any other information provided to the consumer in relation to the product or service". The Code defines "record" as "any document, file or information (whether stored electronically or otherwise) and which is capable of being reproduced in a legible form." Therefore, while a regulated entity is not required by the Code to record telephone calls to comply with Provision 11.5, if the firm does choose to record calls, the Central Bank's view is that the call recordings would constitute 'records' under the definition outlined above and must be retained. If the regulated entity does not record calls, the Central Bank expects that they would document that a telephone call was made and a summary of the conversation, and that this would be retained. Provision 11.6 of the Code requires regulated entities to retain details of individual transactions for six years after the date on which the particu-

lar transaction is discontinued or completed, but must retain all other records for six years from the date on which the regulated entity ceased to provide any product or service to the consumer concerned. The Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (the CCMA) applies to the mortgage loan of a borrower which is secured by his/her primary residence, and sets out how mortgage lenders must treat borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears. Provisions 61 to 65 of the CCMA set out the records and compliance requirements. The CCMA requires a lender to maintain recordings of all Arrears Support Unit telephone calls made to or from a borrower in relation to his/her arrears or pre-arrears. All records required by the CCMA, including call recordings, must be retained by the lender for six years. In addition, all records relating to a borrower must be retained for six years from the date the relationship with the borrower ends.

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Data

190. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the lending targets the SBCI set for lending to SMEs in 2017. [38299/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is Ireland's National Promotional Institution for SMEs and its strategic mission is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources. The SBCI achieves this aim through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk sharing activities supporting the provision of appropriately priced, flexible funding to SMEs.

The SBCI does not lend directly. Rather, the SBCI provides appropriately priced, flexible funding to SMEs via its partner finance providers, known as on-lenders, through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk sharing activities. The SBCI currently has three bank and four non-bank on-lenders: AIB; Bank of Ireland; Ulster Bank; First Citizen Finance; Finance Ireland; Bibby Financial Services Ireland and FEXCO Asset Finance.

The SBCI began lending in March 2015; to the end of June 2017, the SBCI has supported loans totalling €855 million to 21,132 Irish SMEs employing 106,728 people. I am pleased to note that this represents an increase of 57% in SBCI lending since the end of December 2016. It is also very encouraging to note that the interest rate on SBCI loans is, on average, 1.15% lower than the average market interest rate on loans to SMEs and that 85.1% of SBCI loans are to SMEs based outside of Dublin.

The SBCI expects to announce further on-lenders in 2017. It also intends to build further on the risk-sharing aspect of its business model, allowing it to improve the risk appetite of partner finance providers and address new market failures in the SME finance market. The SBCI will do this through its operation and management of the Credit Guarantee Scheme and through the use of European financial instruments

The SBCI's lending to SMEs is largely driven by market demands and needs that are not fully met by the private sector. The Deputy can rest assured that the SBCI is working to develop a more diverse range of on-lenders and innovative products. This will enable it to broaden its distribution capability and market coverage, meet the evolving requirements of the SME finance market and contribute to a sustainable and competitive economy.

Departmental Staff Data

191. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance the annual percent-

age of non-commercial State sponsored bodies staff under the remit of his Department that were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38363/17]

192. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Finance the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38386/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 191 and 192 together.

The annual percentage of public service staff that were women in my Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017 is set out in the following table:

Year	Percentage of public service staff that were women
2010	49.76%
2011	48.19%
2012	49.10%
2013	49.44%
2014	50.30%
2015	46.88%
2016	45.70%
2017 (to 31/08/2017)	

With respect to the eighteen non-commercial bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am advised that six do not employ public service staff. These are the Credit Union Advisory Committee, the Credit Union Restructuring Board, the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, the Financial Services Ombudsman Council, the Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal and the Social Finance Foundation. One further body under the aegis of my Department, the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, is not part of the public service.

The remaining eleven bodies have provided the information sought and this is set out in the following table.

Body	Percentage of public service staff that were women
Comptroller and Audit General	2010 = 44% 2011 = 46% 2012 = 45% 2013 = 48% 2014 = 50% 2015 = 50% 2016 = 47% 2017 = 48%

Body	Percentage of public service staff that were women
Central Bank	2010 = 49% 2011 = 48% 2012 = 48% 2013 = 49% 2014 = 49% 2015 = 49% 2016 = 49% 2017 = 50%
Credit Review Office	2010 = 33% 2011 = 33% 2012 = 33% 2013 = 33% 2014 = 33% 2015 = 33% 2016 = 33% 2017 = 67%
Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau	2010 = 52% 2011 = 50% 2012 = 59% 2013 = 61% 2014 = 59% 2015 = 71% 2016 = 67% 2017 = 69%
Investor Compensation Company Limited	2010 = 46% 2011 = 43% 2012 = 44% 2013 = 44% 2014 = 56% 2015 = 50% 2016 = 33% 2017 = 38 %
Irish Fiscal Advisory Council	(IFAC was established on an interim basis in July 2011 and put on a statutory footing in 2012) 2011 = N/A 2012 = 67% 2013 = 40% 2014 = 29% 2015 = 11% 2016 = 29% 2017 = 44%

Body	Percentage of public service staff that were women
National Asset Management Agency	2010 = 24% 2011 = 33% 2012 = 34% 2013 = 40% 2014 = 43% 2015 = 45% 2016 = 46% 2017 = 48%
National Treasury Management Agency	2010 = 48% 2011 = 50% 2012 = 47% 2013 = 46% 2014 = 47% 2015 = 48% 2016 = 47% 2017 = 48%
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	(Temporary Clerical Officers are not included) 2010 = 61.3% 2011 = 61.6% 2012 = 61.9% 2013 = 62.3% 2014 = 62.8% 2015 = 62.8% 2016 = 62.8% 2017 = 62.9%
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	(SBCI was established in 2014) 2014 = 33% 2015 = 33% 2016 = 44% 2017 = 44%
Tax Appeals Commission	2010 = 40% 2011 = 40% 2012 = 40% 2013 = 50% 2014 = 50% 2015 = 50% 2016 = 57% 2017 = 60% (The Tax Appeals Commission was established on the 21st March 2016 to replace the Office of the Appeal Commissioners. The above figures include those for the Office of the Appeal Commissioners)

Banking Sector

193. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects to finalise his consideration of the merits of local public banks. [38436/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the Programme for Government commits the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) and the Department of Finance to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions. Responsibility for this commitment has now moved from the DAHRRGA to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

A project team with officials from both departments was assembled in early 2017 to investigate the Sparkassen model and other models of local public banking and bring forward a report to both the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D., and myself. I understand that this report is near completion and will be published in due course. It will set out the Irish banking context as well as analysing the responses to the consultation on public banking and its applicability in Ireland. It will then set out the findings and conclusions of the investigation of the Sparkassen model and other models of local public banking.

Tax Code

194. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding a case in which an inheritance is used to purchase an agricultural asset (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38543/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the tax treatment to be applied in the case supplied by the Deputy would depend on the conditions attached to the inheritance of the cash benefit, if any, by the disponer and on whether the inheritance also consisted of agricultural property.

Section 89 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act (CATCA) 2003 provides for agricultural relief. The relief takes the form of a 90% reduction in the taxable market value of gifted or inherited agricultural property. To qualify for the relief, the person taking the gift or inheritance (the ‘beneficiary’) of the agricultural property must first qualify as a ‘farmer’ for the purpose of section 89 CATCA 2003. This means that a beneficiary’s agricultural property must comprise at least 80% by gross market value of the beneficiary’s total property at a particular date.

Section 89 allows that where an inheritance of a benefit has been made conditional on it being invested in agricultural property, then that inheritance will be considered agricultural property for the purposes of the 80% test provided the investment in agricultural property takes place within 2 years of the date of the inheritance. If the cash benefit has been bequeathed without this condition then it will not be treated as agricultural property for the purposes of the 80% test and depending on the value of any other property which would qualify as agricultural property within the same inheritance, it may affect his or her entitlement to agricultural relief.

If the cash benefit does not qualify for agricultural relief, then the inheritance is taxed in the standard way. For the purposes of CAT, the relationship between the disponer and the beneficiary determines the life-time tax-free threshold – known as the “Group threshold” – below which gift or inheritance tax does not arise. Where a person receives gifts or inheritances in excess of their relevant tax free threshold, CAT at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax free threshold.

Currency Exchange

195. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he plans to implement to assist the retail sector due to the difficulties that have arisen from the weakening of the value of sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38597/17]

200. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which he plans to deal with the impact in the fall of the value of sterling for retailers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38614/17]

201. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to protect exporters and importers from the substantial fall in the value of sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38615/17]

216. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to support businesses and sectors which are particularly exposed to the decline in the value of sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38664/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195, 200, 201 and 216 together.

At the outset, let me say that sectoral issues are a matter for the relevant Departments and Ministers.

It must be acknowledged that exchange rate movements over the past year have caused difficulties, particularly for the labour-intensive indigenous sectors. Euro-sterling exchange rate developments have been largely driven by the uncertainty associated with Brexit over the last year or so. There was a notable appreciation of the bilateral rate in the months leading up to the vote and a further sharp appreciation following the outcome of the referendum. Since the vote, the euro has appreciated by approximately 20 per cent against sterling and is currently trading at around €1 = stg£0.91.

As we cannot control the international environment or exchange rate developments, it is crucially important that continued competitiveness improvements are achieved, including by focussing on costs we can control and by boosting our productivity. Ensuring a sustainable path for the public finances is also of fundamental importance.

As the depreciation in sterling most likely reflects a structural change in the UK economy, it is essential that the policy response is also structural in nature and, going without saying, in line with EU State Aid rules. Continued market diversification must be part of the policy response, so that dependence and exposure to the UK market is reduced.

A number of policy initiatives have been introduced since the UK referendum last year. Budget 2017 included a specific set of measures aimed at making Ireland Brexit ready:

- retention of the 9 per cent VAT rate for the hospitality sector
- package of measures to help the agrifood sector
- further resourcing of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland
- extension of benefits to the self-employed
- changes to the tax regime for entrepreneurs

The Government's trade strategy - Ireland Connected - published earlier this year, sets out a number of measures specifically addressing Brexit related issues, including diversification of markets for indigenous exporters.

In addition, my Department continues to work with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, SBCI, Enterprise Ireland, and the Department of Agriculture to develop potential supports in response to the future needs of businesses impacted by Brexit. Development of these proposed responses is subject to resources being agreed as part of the annual budgetary process.

Advisory supports in relation to business planning, such as those provided by the Local Enterprise Offices and Enterprise Ireland, will also be particularly important in assisting viable but vulnerable SMEs that may be adversely affected due to Brexit. These supports will help raise awareness of both private market financial supports and existing State supports.

Property Tax

196. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review the property tax, in view of the impact of the increase in property values on the LPT; if he considered varying the rates to balance the impact of higher property values; if these issues will be addressed in the proposed three year budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38608/17]

244. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reimburse persons for private property valuations with a decrease in property tax in view of the fact that property valuations have increased nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39024/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 and 244 together.

The Department of Finance engaged Dr. Don Thornhill in 2015 to conduct a review to consider and make recommendations on the operation of the Local Property Tax, in particular any impacts on LPT liabilities due to property price developments.

Dr. Thornhill made a number of recommendations in his report on his review of the Local Property Tax. His central recommendation was for a revised system whereby a minimum level of LPT revenues in each local authority area would be determined by Government, ideally having regard to the apportionment between local authority areas of the historic yield. This in turn would allow for the estimation of LPT rates for each local authority area and the application of these by taxpayers and Revenue. Local authorities could adjust this rate upwards by a factor of up to 15%. This new system was recommended by Dr. Thornhill with a possible interim deferral of the next valuation date until November 2018 or November 2019.

The Minister for Finance subsequently proposed to Government that the revaluation date for the LPT be postponed from 2016 to 2019. This postponement meant that home owners were not faced with significant increases in their LPT in 2017 as a result of increased property values. The postponement also gives sufficient time for the other recommendations in Dr. Thornhill's report to be considered fully by the Government and there are no proposals to change this.

The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2015 gave effect to the postponement of the revaluation date of residential property for LPT purposes, and also to two of the recommendations in Dr. Thornhill's report, involving LPT relief for properties affected by pyrite and relief for properties occupied by persons with disabilities.

My Department will be considering issues relating to the implementation of other recommendations in the Thornhill Report in due course in line with the 2019 timeline.

National Debt

197. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the schedule of amounts, maturity dates and interest rates on Ireland's outstanding debt; the highest rates of interest applied to Irish borrowings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38609/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Debt is the net debt incurred by the Exchequer after taking account of cash balances and other financial assets. Gross National Debt is the principal component of General Government Debt.

Details of the provisional and unaudited composition of Gross National Debt, its residual maturity and average interest rates as at end-June 2017 are set out in the table below.

The exact maturity dates of all Government bonds and EU-IMF Programme loans are available on the website of the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) at <http://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/funding-and-debt-management>.

An annual maturity profile of Ireland's Long-Term Marketable and Official Debt is also available on the NTMA website at

<http://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/funding-and-debt-management/debt-profile/maturity-profile/>.

The highest individual rate of interest applying to current debt outstanding is on the Irish Amortising Bonds due to mature in January 2037 (€114 million outstanding at end-June 2017), May 2042 (€217 million) and September 2047 (€123 million). Each of these bonds carries an annual coupon of 5.92%.

Gross National Debt as at end-June 2017	-	-	-
Instrument	Outstanding Balance	Weighted Average Residual Maturity	Weighted Average Interest Rate
-	€bn	Years	%
Government Bonds	128.9	10.7	3.5% ¹
EU-IMF Programme	50.2	10.72	2.1% ²
State Savings	17.33	3	0.33%-1.5% ³
Other Medium and Long-Term Debt	1.9	19.54	3.0% ⁴
Short term debt	9.95	0.35	-0.4% ⁵
Total Gross National Debt	208.2	-	-
Source: NTMA	-	-	-

The figures in the table above are provisional and unaudited. They are therefore subject to revision.

Rounding may affect totals. National Debt figures take account of the effect of currency hedging transactions.

Notes to table:

1 The nominal interest rate is displayed, which differs from the yield at issue. Government Bonds include an Inflation-linked bond which pays an annual coupon of 0.25%; the actual interest payments on this bond will be linked to the Eurostat Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices

(HICP) for Ireland, excluding tobacco).

2 EFSM loans are subject to maturity extensions designed to bring the original weighted average maturity to 19.5 years. It is not expected that Ireland will have to refinance any of its EFSM loans before 2027. However as the revised maturity dates of individual EFSM loans will only be determined as they approach their original maturity dates, the weighted average maturity figure above does not fully reflect the maturity extensions. Including certain assumptions for EFSM maturity extensions, the estimated residual weighted average maturity of EU-IMF Programme loans was 12.6 years at end-June 2017. The EU-IMF Programme interest rate is an estimated weighted average, euro equivalent interest rate.

3 State Savings Schemes also include money invested by depositors in the Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) which does not form part of the National Debt but is part of General Government Debt. Taking into account POSB Deposits, total State Savings outstanding were €20.3 billion at end-June 2017. State Savings include products with original maturities ranging from 3 - 10 years. These products generally have a very high re-investment rate. Irrespective of the original term, NTMA State Savings products can be encashed on demand at any time - repayment takes 7 days. Prize Bonds can be encashed when 90 days have elapsed after the purchase date and you will receive the full face value on your bonds within 7 working days. The interest rates shown are the maximum interest rates (AER) payable on the fixed term, fixed rate products available for purchase at end-June 2017. It was announced in July 2017 that the Prize Bond prize fund rate was to change to 0.50%, from 0.85%, applicable from August 2017.

4 The table shows the weighted average maturity and interest rate for Private Placements, Euro Medium Term Notes, and loans from the European Investment Bank and Council of Europe Development Bank.

5 The table shows the weighted average maturity and euro equivalent interest rate for Treasury Bills, Euro Commercial Paper, Exchequer Notes and Central Treasury Notes. The short-term debt outstanding balance also includes Borrowing from Ministerial Funds.

Tax Strategy Group

198. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the studies the Tax Strategy Group has carried out in respect of tax incentives to promote social affordable housing in new residential developments. [38610/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Tax Strategy Group (TSG) is in place since the early 1990's and is chaired by the Department of Finance with membership comprising senior officials and political advisers from a number of Civil Service Departments and Offices.

Papers on various options for tax policy changes are prepared annually by Department of Finance officials. The TSG is not a decision making body and the papers produced by the Department are simply a list of options and issues to be considered in the Budgetary process. Papers relating to PRSI and social welfare issues are also prepared for the Group by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

In line with the Government's commitment to Budgetary reform including greater engagement with the Oireachtas, the TSG Papers are now published in advance of the Budget to facilitate informed discussion. Accordingly the Budget 2018 TSG Papers were published on my Department's website on 31 July:-

(www.finance.gov.ie/updates/budget-2018-tax-strategy-group-papers).

A total of thirteen Papers cover a wide range of tax-related topics. There is no Paper which covers the specific issue raised by the Deputy but a number of Papers addressed topics related to housing. In particular she may wish to note Paper TSG 17-03, The Tax and Fiscal Treatment of Rental Accommodation Providers. A Working Group to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers) was established in January 2017. This was on foot of a commitment contained in the 'Strategy for the Rental Sector', published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in December 2016. As part of its work, the Group conducted a public consultation over four weeks from Friday 10 March to Friday 7 April 2017. A preliminary output of the Working Group was presented in this TSG Paper and discussed at the meeting of the TSG which was held at my Department on 25 July. The Report of the Working Group, including an outline of the findings of the public consultation, is currently being finalised. This Report, including an outline of the findings of the public consultation, will inform my consideration of any potential measures relating to the tax treatment of rental accommodation providers as part of my deliberations for Budget 2018. It is envisaged that the Final Report of the Working Group will be published on the Budget website (www.budget.gov.ie) on Budget Day.

Mortgage Book Sales

199. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fear and distress being caused by recent media reports of the proposed sale of a portfolio of €1.25 billion mortgage loans by a bank (details supplied); the measures he proposes to protect the homes of vulnerable families whose mortgage loan may be sold on at a discount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38612/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The proposed sale referred to in media reports appears to relate the sale of buy-to-let mortgages rather than homeloans. Nevertheless I will address the Deputy's concern in relation to homeloans.

The Deputy will be aware that there are substantial protections in place for customers in the event that a loan is sold from the original provider to a third party. The Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 was enacted in July 2015 and is designed to protect borrowers in this situation. Under the Act, purchasers of loan books must either be regulated by the Central Bank themselves or else the loans must be serviced by a credit servicing firm who is regulated by the Central Bank.

Under the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 relevant borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory codes (such as the Consumer Protection Code, Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland and the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation on 1 July 2016.

The sale of a loan from one entity to another does not change the terms of the contract or the borrower's rights and obligations under the original contract. My Department will continue to keep all relevant legislation under review in order to ensure that borrowers whose loans have been sold are properly protected and do not lose any protections which they previously enjoyed. In addition, the Department of Finance expect that the Central Bank as regulator of credit servicing firms, will be vigilant in this area and raise any specific instances where they have found consumers have not had their protections upheld or where their positions have been

disadvantaged.

In relation to tenants, landlord-tenant relations are governed by multiple pieces of legislation (mainly under the aegis of my colleague, the Minister for the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government). The landlord/owner of the property is restricted in what they can do in relation to removal of tenants from a property. These restrictions are the same whether the landlord bought the property, built the property themselves, became a landlord as a result of renting out what was formerly a principal dwelling house or acquired the property by other means such as enforcing loans secured on the property.

As the Deputy is aware, non-performing loans (NPL's) remain at an elevated level across the European banking system and addressing this issue is one of the key priorities for the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). In Ireland significant progress has been made across the banking sector in reducing the level of NPLs since the financial crisis. Despite this progress, the level of NPLs in the Irish banking sector remains well above the European average. Hence the SSM has tasked the management and board of each institution with developing and implementing a strategy to address this challenge. This challenge will have to be met whether or not the State has a shareholding in the bank concerned.

The disposal of a loan or portfolio of loans is a commercial decision, and therefore a decision for the management and Board of each individual institution. As the deputy is aware, the relationships between the Minister for Finance and the banks in which the State is a shareholder are governed by a number of Relationship Frameworks which can be found on my department's website. The Relationship Frameworks define the 'arms-length' nature of this relationship, allowing for oversight of significant actions taken while fully preserving the commercial independence of each bank, and the fiduciary responsibilities of their management and Board. A disposal such as that referred to by the Deputy is not subject to Ministerial consent but, if the value is greater than €50m in the case of the bank referred to, is subject to Ministerial consultation.

Questions Nos. 200 and 201 answered with Question No. 195.

Personal Debt

202. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Minister for Finance the level of car loan indebtedness, in particular personal contract plan car loans; the value and number of such loans in each of the years 2014 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38617/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank that the Bank does not have figures in relation to the level of car loan indebtedness and in particular personal contract plans (PCP) in the format requested by the Deputy.

However the Bank has informed me that loans extended by credit institutions to private households for the purpose of car finance would be included under Consumer Credit in the monthly Table A.1 of the Credit and Banking Statistics. This table would also include hire purchase and PCP agreements provided by Irish resident banks. Full details are available at <https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/bank-balance-sheets/bank-balance-sheets-data>.

Loans extended by credit institutions to private households for car finance purposes would be included in the quarterly dataset; "Finance for other Purposes" in Table A.18 – "Credit advanced to and Deposits from Irish Private Households". Full details are available at <https://>

www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/private-household-credit-and-deposits

On the issue more generally, the CCPC has conducted research into the car market and car finance sectors, and has conducted numerous public awareness campaigns on the issue of car finance in recent years. It's most recent campaign, which ran in June/July 2017, focused on car finance and was specifically aimed at providing information to consumers on issues in relation to PCPs, such as the fact that the consumer does not become the legal owner of the car until they make the final payment.

On 17 July the CCPC announced that it had commenced a study of the PCP car finance market. I have been informed that the CCPC's study is examining the experiences of consumers and assessing the information provided to them at the point-of-sale. The study will also analyse consumers' understanding of PCPs, the structure of the product, the options available to consumers at the end of the agreement, and the protections available to PCP consumers under the existing legislative framework. I await the outcome of the study.

Income Data

203. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons earning in excess of and less than €1 million per annum respectively in bands of €50,000; the rate of taxation for each band in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38625/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the numbers of taxpayers by ranges of gross income in 2015, the latest year for which data are available, as well as for 2014 and 2013, are available at http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=rva01&ProductID=DB_rv01&PLanguage=0.

It should be noted however that this breakdown is not available by individual persons but is presented in terms of tax units (either individuals or married persons / civil partners who have elected or who have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment, who are counted as one tax unit). As such, a jointly-assessed couple with income of €32,000 each would have total income of €64,000 and therefore appear in the income range €60,000 to €70,000.

A further extension of the table is below, detailing the number of income cases, gross income and tax deducted for those in the gross income range €275,000 to €999,999 and €1,000,000 and over. While this does not provide the full set of ranges of income specified by the Deputy, it represents the information available from Revenue at this time. The table below and those on the website also show the amount of income earned and Income Tax paid in each income range.

	2013	2013	2014	2014	2015	2015
	€275,000 - €999,999	€1,000,000 and over	€275,000 - €999,999	€1,000,000 and over	€275,000 - €999,999	€1,000,000 and over
Number of Income Cases (Number)	9,338	616	9,799	650	11,057	850
Gross Income (Million)	3,959.89	1,164.11	4,181.60	1,249.50	4,736.72	2,869.26

Tax De- ducted (Million)	1,277.93	401.05	1,370.91	435.76	1,547.33	1,034.09
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Tax Data

204. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the amount raised by the Revenue Commissioners in the clampdown on offshore bank accounts earlier in 2017; the number of persons involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38626/17]

207. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tax payers that availed of the provisions of section 56 of the Finance Act 2016, by county, in tabular form; and the amount of tax, interest and penalties received by the Revenue Commissioners. [38631/17]

208. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance further to section 56 of the Finance Act 2016, the number of criminal prosecutions likely to arise from the failure by taxpayers to bring their affairs up to date by 1 May; if he will allocate additional resources to the Revenue Commissioners to ensure that all those that have failed to bring their affairs up to date are prosecuted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38632/17]

212. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the tax, interest and penalties received by the Revenue Commissioners arising from the enactment of section 56 of the Finance Act 2016, by the source of income and or asset previously undeclared; if he will provide an analysis of the number of defaulters by income source that provided declarations, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38637/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204, 207, 208 and 212 together.

In his Financial Statement to the House on 11 October 2016, Minister Noonan indicated that he would act to restrict the opportunity for tax defaulters with outstanding tax liabilities relating to offshore matters to avail of the voluntary disclosure regime. In line with this undertaking, section 56 of the Finance Act 2016 provided that, as and from 1 May 2017, the making of a qualifying disclosure is no longer permitted where the tax liabilities involved relate to offshore matters.

The period during which a qualifying disclosure could be made to Revenue in relation to offshore matters ended on 4 May 2017. Disclosures received are still being processed and final data will be available shortly. I am advised by Revenue that the number of disclosures exceeds 2,700, with a declared value of more than €79 million. I understand also that the disclosures relate to a range of offshore matters, including foreign sources of employment –related income, foreign pensions, income from overseas property, offshore bank accounts, offshore trusts and offshore funds. A breakdown between tax, interest and penalties of disclosures to date is as follows:

Tax:	€48.5 million
Interest:	€24.5 million
Penalties:	€ 6.0 million

The following table provides an analysis of the previously undisclosed income sources and assets that were included in the qualifying disclosures received

Source	Percent
Pension	16%
Bank Account	17%
Shares	20%
Property	29%
Offshore Fund	4%
Trust	1%
Earned Income	3%
Inheritance	1%
Multiple	4%
Unspecified	5%

I am advised by Revenue, that a full analysis of disclosures received by county is not currently available, this analysis will be available once all disclosures have been finalised.

For those who have tax liabilities relating to offshore matters and who did not act by the deadline of 4 May 2017 to address them, they now face the prospect of substantially higher penalties, publication in Revenue's Quarterly List of Tax Defaulters and possible prosecution.

The international environment is changing, with closer cooperation and information-sharing between tax authorities worldwide aimed at identifying those who seek to hide their profits or gains offshore. Revenue is at the forefront of international developments for Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI), which include the OECD's Common Reporting Standard (CRS) and the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) initiative. Data received under FATCA is currently being examined and it is expected that enquiry letters will be issued later this year to relevant taxpayers, and data under CRS is not expected until 30 September 2017. These initiatives will provide Revenue with considerable amounts of data about offshore accounts, structures and assets, and Revenue has advised me that they are committed to making full and effective use of this information to pursue rigorously anyone who attempts to use such means to evade their tax obligations. It is not possible at this point to estimate the number of prosecutions likely to arise from Revenue's enquiries relating to data received under AEOI. However, I am advised that cases will be investigated with a view to prosecution where the facts and circumstances warrant such a course of action.

I will continue to fully support Revenue in relation to its pursuit of non-compliant taxpayers and will ensure that they have all the necessary resources required to achieve this objective.

Tax Residency

205. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the data required of non-resident tax exiles; the number of days they are allowed stay here; the contribution via taxation and levies in the past three years and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38627/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Deputy's office that this question relates to the Domicile Levy.

Individuals who spend less than 183 days in this country in a tax year are considered non-resident for tax purposes. This also applies to individuals who spend less than 280 days here over a period of two consecutive years.

The Domicile Levy was introduced in the 2010 Finance Act and is payable on or before

31 October in the year following the valuation date on a self-assessment basis. For example, the due date in respect of 2015 was 31 October 2016. The valuation date is 31 December each year. The legislation providing for the Domicile Levy does not require an individual to confirm a place of residence on the return made to Revenue.

The Levy is charged on all Irish-domiciled individuals who meet the qualifying criteria in a tax year. The amount of the Levy, where it applies, is €200,000 per annum. For the tax years 2010 and 2011, it was a requirement that the person liable be both an Irish citizen and Irish domiciled. The requirement to be an Irish citizen was removed for the tax year 2012 and later years.

The Levy currently applies to an individual for a tax year if he or she is Irish-domiciled, has Irish property (as defined) greater than €5 million in the tax year, has worldwide income in excess of €1 million for the tax year and has an Irish income tax liability of less than €200,000 for the tax year. Irish tax residence is not a requirement for the Levy to apply.

The purpose of the Levy is to ensure that Irish-domiciled individuals who meet certain criteria make a contribution to the Exchequer, irrespective of where they are resident for tax purposes.

Where the Levy applies to an individual for a tax year, he or she is entitled to credit any Irish income tax paid for that year against the amount of the Levy.

The following table sets out the number of persons who have filed Domicile Levy returns and the amount collected for the three latest years for which information is available. The table excludes 2016 and 2017 to date because the Levy for 2016 is not due until 31 October 2017 and the Levy for 2017 is not due until 31 October 2018.

Levy Year	No of Persons	Amount Collected (€m)
2013	20	€1.90
2014	13	€2.02
2015	13	€2.30

Revenue Commissioners Data

206. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of spontaneous notifications sent by the Revenue Commissioners to other EU states and non-EU countries for which there is a tax treaty in place relating to tax affairs of companies based in those states for each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to 31 August 2017, by country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38630/17]

209. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of notifications sent by the Revenue Commissioners to other EU states and non-EU countries for which there is a tax treaty in place relating to persons letting property via a web platform (details supplied) in those states for 2015 and 2016 and to 31 August 2017, by country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38634/17]

210. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of notifications sent by the Revenue Commissioners to other EU states and non-EU countries for which there is a tax treaty in place relating to those trading through a web platform (details supplied) in those states for 2015 and 2016 and to 31 August 2017, by country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38635/17]

211. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of notifications sent by the Revenue Commissioners to other EU states under obligations arising from 2011/16/EU dealing with administrative co-operation on taxation, by the type of income involved (details supplied) for 2016 and to 31 August 2017, by country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38636/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 209 to 211, inclusive, together.

I have been advised by Revenue that exchange of information carried out under the provisions of Ireland's international agreements including double taxation treaties and the Council Directive 2011/16/EU on Administrative Cooperation in the Field of Taxation is governed by strict confidentiality provisions and the details of any specific exchanges that have taken place in relation to individual companies or between Ireland and specific jurisdictions cannot be disclosed.

However Revenue has provided the following broad information in relation to exchange of information.

Spontaneous exchanges of information with other jurisdictions in relation to companies.

2013 - 1 exchange

2014 - 2 exchanges

2015 - 3 exchanges

2016 - 28 exchanges

2017 (to August) - 2 exchanges

Since 1 April 2016, Revenue have spontaneously exchanged opinions with jurisdictions that have committed to Action 5 of the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Package and with which Ireland has a legal arrangement. These opinions all relate to companies. In 2016, Revenue exchanged 24 opinions and in 2017 they exchanged 2 opinions. The figure for 2016 included older opinions exchanged under a "lookback" procedure. These are included in the figures above for 2016 and 2017.

Exchanges of data under Council Directive 2011/16/EU on Administrative Cooperation in the Field of Taxation

Revenue has provided the following broad information i.e. by category and year, in relation to the exchange of information with other Member States under the Directive on Administrative Cooperation.

Category	Number of records exchanged relating to 2014	Number of records exchanged relating to 2015
Directors Fees	1,763	1,764
Income from Employment	1,564	2,045
Immovable Properties	21,892	21,932
Life Insurance	0	0
Pensions	162	361
Total	25,381	26,102

Records relating to 2014 were exchanged during 2016 and records relating to 2015 were exchanged during 2017. The records relating to 2016 will be exchanged in 2018. No records relating to life insurance are exchanged as this information is not available in Revenue systems and as a result cannot be exchanged with other Member States.

Other exchange of information

In addition, Revenue exchange information on request and automatically with partner jurisdictions. Automatic exchange of information includes the exchange of financial account information with the USA (under legislation implementing the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA)). Exchange of financial account information under Directive 2014/107/EU (which amends Council Directive 2011/16/EU on Administrative Cooperation in the Field of Taxation) and the OECD Common Reporting Standard is due to take place before the end of September this year.

Questions Nos. 207 and 208 answered with Question No. 204.

Questions Nos. 209 to 211, inclusive, answered with Question No. 206.

Question No. 212 answered with Question No. 204.

Brexit Issues

213. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has conducted an analysis of the additional costs for businesses here, including the cost of the tariffs, administration costs and commercial costs in terms of freight delays and so on, in the event of the UK leaving the customs union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38656/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This is a question more appropriate for the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation who should be able to provide details of work being carried out in her Department.

Question No. 214 answered with Question No. 117.

European Banking Authority

215. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the State's bid to host the European Banking Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38661/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Due to the decision of the United Kingdom to exit the European Union, two European Agencies currently located in London, the European Banking Authority (EBA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA), will have to relocate.

Member States interested in hosting one or both of the Agencies were required to submit a formal offer to the European Commission and Ireland's formal offer to host the EBA in Dublin was submitted to the Commission by the Department of Finance on 31 July 2017.

The European Council has received 8 offers from Member States to host the EBA. All offers are available on the website of the European Council. Alongside Ireland's bid, offers to relocate the EBA to Frankfurt, Paris, Prague, Warsaw, Vienna, Brussels or Luxembourg were

submitted.

The Irish offer document outlines how Dublin meets the objective criteria that have been set out by the European Council and Commission, and highlights how a relocation to Dublin would result in the least amount of disruption for both the Authority and its staff.

The document outlines that as an integral part of the European System of Financial Supervision, it is essential that the Authority can continue its critical work with minimal disturbance during the transition to a new location. The retention of specialised staff is also vital for the continuity of the EBA's work to ensure effective and consistent prudential regulation and supervision across the European banking sector.

Ireland meets all the criteria as outlined by the European Council to host the EBA, and given the economic and strategic benefits for Ireland, the proposal includes incentives to support the relocation of the EBA and the establishment of a Relocation Group to facilitate the move to Dublin.

Ireland's bid document also highlights suitable commercial properties in Dublin which can cater to the EBA'S requirements and timeline. These properties have been identified with the help of the IDA Property Team and are located close to or within the city centre.

The European Commission will assess all of the formal offers by 30 September 2017, and submit its assessment of them to the Secretary-General of the Council for distribution to the Member States.

Since the Government's public declaration in hosting the EBA we have been actively promoting Ireland as the location of choice for the EBA and engaging with relevant stakeholders.

Minister of State D'Arcy and myself will continue to promote Ireland's EBA offer in upcoming meetings and engagements with our EU counterparts and other relevant stakeholders.

Officials in my Department are maintaining contact with our Embassies and Missions abroad who are also promoting our bids among relevant contacts in EU capitals. In addition they are also engaging with their counterparts in other finance ministries to put forward Ireland's case to host the EBA.

A final decision on the new location of the Agencies will take place by a voting process on 20 November in the margins of the General Affairs Council (GAC) (Art. 50).

Question No. 216 answered with Question No. 195.

Brexit Issues

217. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the development of sectoral response plans for Brexit; the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38694/17]

218. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38710/17]

219. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38726/17]

220. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38742/17]

221. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38758/17]

222. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38774/17]

223. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38806/17]

225. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38838/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 to 223, inclusive, and 225 together.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach" published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in the comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;

- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;

- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;

- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;

- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

Within the whole-of Government framework for Brexit, the Department of Finance has lead responsibility for the macroeconomic and financial sector issues. The Department has been assessing and preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the UK referendum in June 2016. This included the study, published in November 2015, under the ESRI-Department of Finance research programme, entitled *'Scoping the Possible Economic Implications of Brexit on Ireland'*. Following the result of the UK referendum, a Brexit Unit was established within the EU and International Division of my Department, to oversee and coordinate the work of fully understanding and preparing for the challenges and opportunities associated with Brexit.

As part of the initial response to Brexit, Budget 2017 contained a number of measures to address the challenges of Brexit, to mitigate future risks, and to support any opportunities that might arise. These included measures to support SMEs, entrepreneurship, agri-food and Irish exporters. These followed on from the Department's detailed analysis of sectoral exposure to Brexit across the economy which was published with the Budget.

Subsequently, the Department worked with the ESRI to deepen the macroeconomic analysis and a report titled *'Modelling the Medium to Long Term Potential Macroeconomic Impact of Brexit on Ireland'* was published in November 2016. In April 2017, updated macroeconomic forecasts were published by my Department, as part of the Stability Programme Update.

Department of Finance contingency work is ongoing and rightly continues to examine all possible scenarios, challenges and opportunities. This work is an important input to the whole-of-Government work being overseen through the relevant structures. In accordance with its role, the Department continues to monitor the economic impacts and carry out relevant analysis, and to frame budgetary policy advice in this new context of Brexit.

It is clear from the Department's own published research that the potential impact on the Irish economy is significant. The medium to long term economic impacts of a 'hard Brexit' with reversion to the WTO trade rules are set out in the November 2016 study referenced above. Looking at the effect ten years after a UK exit, a hard Brexit scenario results in the level of GDP being almost 4% below what it otherwise might have been.

As regards the prioritisation of responses to Brexit, the Summer Economic Statement sets out the Government's approach which is to strengthen the resilience of the economy against an international backdrop of heightened uncertainty. The best and most immediate policy under the Government's control to counter the likely negative economic impacts of Brexit is to prudently manage the public finances in order to ensure that Ireland's economy continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. It is important also to recognise that the full impact of the UK's exit is only expected to materialise over time. As we cannot control the

international environment, we will need to continue to improve our competitiveness, including by focussing on costs we can control, by boosting our productivity and ensuring sustainable public finances. Continued prudent management of the public finances is a critical aspect of the Government's overall strategy to mitigate the economic challenges associated with Brexit, as outlined in the Government's Position paper published on 2 May and in the Summer Economic Statement.

Of course, Brexit will also provide opportunities for Ireland. There include opportunities to increase our share of financial services based inward investment. Minister of State Michael D'Arcy T.D. has responsibility for Financial Services, including the implementation of the dynamic and evolving IFS2020 Strategy. We will continue to leverage our IFS2020 Strategy to maximise opportunities arising as a result of Brexit.

The Department is working within the whole-of-Government framework for the preparation of sectoral Brexit response plans. This will ensure that that we will be in a position to counter negative economic impacts arising from Brexit, that our interests are protected in the negotiations at EU level, and also that we can seek to maximise opportunities arising, including in the financial services sector.

The Department will continue to carry out the necessary research, analysis and consultations, and to develop budgetary policy in the context of Brexit.

Brexit Staff

224. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38822/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance has been assessing and preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016. Following the result of the UK referendum, work has been intensified across the whole of Government level, including in my own Department, to ensure that Ireland's interests are protected in the negotiations at EU level and to ensure that Ireland will be in position to mitigate the negative economic impacts arising from Brexit.

In my own Department, a Brexit Unit was established in July 2016, within the EU and International Division, to oversee and coordinate this work and to act as a key liaison point with the Department of the Taoiseach, in particular. This Unit is currently at full operational capacity.

In addition, the Department of Finance staff complement in the Irish Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels has been strengthened. The challenge which we face as a result of Brexit is mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning.

Brexit issues are mainstreamed into the Department's work in all areas including economic analysis, financial services and taxation. Brexit issues are being dealt with on a cross department basis and managed through the EU Strategy Committee (at Assistant Secretary level) and a cross-divisional Working Group at Principal level. Brexit is a standing item on the Department's weekly Executive Board agenda and is mainstreamed across all divisions, something that is reflected in business planning.

Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 217.

Brexit Staff

226. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38854/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government has been preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016, with this work now intensified. The Government is clear and determined that all possible preparations will be made ahead of the UK leaving the EU. A critical aspect of the Government's contingency planning and preparations is extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Department of Finance has responsibility for leading on stakeholder engagement in the area of financial services. Minister of State for Financial Services Michael D'Arcy T.D. has responsibility for financial services, including the IFS2020 Strategy, which has a strong Brexit focus, and has been drafted in close consultation with key public sector and industry stakeholders. Minister of State D'Arcy chairs quarterly joint meetings with an Industry Advisory Committee, which represents the financial services industry, and the IFS2020 public sector High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), which is a senior group of civil and public servants representing the public sector. Additionally, the Department of Finance chairs The IFS2020 Public Sector Coordination Group which is an interdepartmental group, which includes representatives from IDA and Enterprise Ireland. This group has met 20 times since June 2016, most recently on 6 September 2017.

The Department hosted a Financial Services Sectoral Dialogue on Brexit in Dublin Castle on 12 April 2017.

Brexit Data

227. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38886/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Department of Finance has been preparing for the impact of Brexit since well before the referendum on 23 June 2016, with this work now intensified. In that regard, the Department has been to the fore in producing and funding a number of Brexit-related studies, both before and since the UK's referendum decision.

To date, outputs include:

- A scoping study published in November 2015 under the Department of Finance-ESRI joint research programme;

- An in-depth analysis of the possible sectoral and regional impacts of Brexit arising from Ireland's trade relationship with the UK, published with Budget 2017;

- A joint research paper with the ESRI, published in November 2016, that modelled the medium to long term macroeconomic impact of Brexit under a number of scenarios, including a hard Brexit.

Ongoing studies include:

- A new sectoral study entitled “UK EU Exit: Trade Exposures of Sectors of the Irish Economy in a European Context” examining the trade exposures of sectors of the Irish economy and other EU-27 Member States, will be published by my Department very shortly.

- A study currently being undertaken under the Department of Finance-ESRI Joint Research Programme covering the following: volumes of trade arriving from the UK and by what mode (for example container or refrigerated truck); the extent to which trade from other countries arrives in Ireland using the UK as a land-bridge; scenarios for how much these trade levels might be affected by the introduction of tariffs or non-tariff barriers. This research is expected to be completed later in 2017.

The Department of Finance will continue to carry out relevant analysis within its areas of responsibility as required.

Expenditure Reviews

228. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38902/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report sets out the pre-Budget expenditure ceiling for my Ministerial Vote Group of €439 million for current expenditure and €25 million for capital expenditure. This represents the spending baseline for examination of my Department’s budgetary priorities for 2018.

As outlined in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, the increases planned in expenditure for the delivery of public services are set at sustainable levels in order to ensure that the resources allocated are affordable both now and in the future. Consequently, it is important that there is an ongoing focus on the totality of Departmental spending and not just the incremental increase each year.

This was the context for this year’s Spending Review which will support the consideration of existing expenditure alongside budgetary proposals during the Budget Estimates process. Where any savings are identified during the Estimates process, they can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space. Work is ongoing in this regard.

NAMA Loans Sale

229. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 83 of 18 May 2017, the three bidders and the corresponding portfolio that were successful following their reverse inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38943/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by NAMA that, following openly marketed processes, the successful bidders in each referenced loan sale were as follows:

Loan sale	Initial bidder query
Aspen	Starwood
Abbey	Apollo

Jewel	Allianz (Hammerson and Allianz were ultimately the successful bidders)
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Tax Reliefs Costs

230. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the special assignee relief programme in each of the years since its existence; and the number of employees covered by the scheme in each of these years. [38962/17]

238. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the first and full year cost of increasing the year limit for the special assignee relief programme from five years to ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39018/17]

239. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the first and full year cost of reducing the €75,000 limit to €60,000, €50,000 and €40,000, respectively, for the special assignee relief programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39019/17]

240. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend the special assignee relief programme, SARP, to employees employed from outside an organisation rather than restricting it to employees moving within an organization; the cost of increasing the scope of SARP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39020/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230, and 238 to 240, inclusive, together.

As part of the Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP) review in 2014, the proposal to include employees that were newly employed from outside an organization rather than restricting it to employees moving within an organization was considered. However, the review found that to include new hires in this manner could cause job displacement in the Irish labour market. If, for example, an Irish tax resident individual and a foreign based individual with similar skills both applied for the same job, it would be less costly for the employer to hire the foreign based individual. This would place the Irish tax resident individual at a considerable disadvantage.

Regarding the potential cost of reducing the €75,000 limit under SARP to €60,000, €50,000 and €40,000, I am advised by Revenue that it is tentatively estimated, without taking account of the potential new employees that may qualify for the scheme as a result of the reduced limits, the cost to the Exchequer in terms of income tax foregone, and based on the employees currently availing of the relief, would be:

1. €60,000 limit: €0.48 million and €0.54 million first and full year cost respectively.
2. €50,000 limit: €0.81 million and €0.91 million first and full year cost respectively.
3. €40,000 limit: €1.13 million and €1.27 million first and full year cost respectively.

In addition to the foregoing, and as the deputies will be aware, the services of my department are available to cost tax policy and other proposals for political parties on a confidential basis. Guidelines have been issued from my department as to the operation of this facility for Budget 2018.

In relation to increasing the eligibility criteria for SARP from 5 years to 10 years, I am advised by Revenue that there are no data on which to estimate the potential impact to the Exchequer of increasing the claim period in this manner. The data on numbers availing of SARP are

compiled on a year by year basis; data on the duration each claimant has been claiming for is not readily available, nor is it possible to estimate the number of claimants who would continue to claim relief beyond 5 years should SARP be extended, therefore it is not possible to estimate a cost to the Exchequer for this proposal.

Finally, regarding the cost of the scheme and the number of employees covered by it on an annual basis since it has been available, Revenue reports that provide a detailed analysis of the SARP programme for 2012-2015 are available at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/research/statistical-reports/special-asignee-relief-programme.aspx>. From these reports, the following table sets out the cost of SARP by year for each the years 2012 to 2015 (the last year for which figures are available).

Year	No. of Employees	Tax Cost of Relief
2012	11	€0.1 million
2013	121	€1.9 million
2014	302	€5.9 million
2015	586	€9.5 million

Tax Yield

231. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated yield in 2018 and in a full year from a 15 cent levy on a standard can of sugar sweetened drink with commensurate levies for higher volumes. [38967/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is my intention to introduce a tax on sugar-sweetened drinks in April 2018, to coincide with the introduction of a similar tax in the UK at that time. This tax will be imposed as a volumetric tax as a specific amount per litre of product, as opposed to an ad valorem rate imposed on the final retail price of product. This is to ensure that the tax is applied to sugar content of the product regardless of the retail price.

The 2016 Tax Strategy papers estimated potential yields from a tax on sugar sweetened drinks based on total soft drink sales in Ireland of 685.4 million litres per annum. The TSG papers estimated that the tax would apply to 60% of these sales at the time. However, it is now expected that the tax will apply to much less than 60% of these sales as the soft drinks industry continue to reformulate their products, reducing sugar content. Accordingly it is difficult to estimate accurately the expected tax yield. However, it is likely that a tax on sugar sweetened beverages, levied at 15c on a 330ml can, could yield in the region of €45m in 2018 and €60m in a full year.

I have not yet finalised the structure, scope or rate of the tax, so estimates are preliminary and subject to change. It is expected that the underpinning legislation will be introduced in this year's Finance Act.

Tax Yield

232. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue yield in 2018 and in a full year from a 1% increase in betting tax on both in shop and online betting. [38970/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated yield that would be generated if the rate of betting tax was increased is available in the

pre-Budget 2018 Ready Reckoner at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/ready-reckoners.pdf>.

Banking Sector Data

233. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of branches in each of the State-supported banks that do not accept coins as lodgements; the policies each of the State-supported banks have in relation to the receipt of coins; the statutory role of his Department and the Central Bank in relation to this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39012/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, the role of the Minister for Finance in relation to coins is set out in the Coinage Act 1950, the Decimal Currency Acts 1969-1990 and the Economic and Monetary Union Act 1998. The Economic and Monetary Union Act 1998 covers issuance of both circulating and commemorative coins. The Central Bank of Ireland acts as an agent of the Minister of Finance in the production and the issuing of euro coins, in accordance with the principles and rules of the Eurosystem. It has the exclusive right to issue cash into circulation and responsibility for the organisation of the national cash cycle.

In relation to the individual banks I have received the following responses to the Deputy's question.

AIB:

“AIB continues to support our customers' requirements in regard to coin lodgements. AIB accepts coin lodgements in all (*) branches during normal hours. Additionally, in response to customers' needs, AIB has further recently invested in new Coin Dropsafe devices for busier branches which offer customers a new more convenient choice for lodging coin to an AIB account during busy teller periods. This service is unique in the marketplace and has been specifically designed for AIB so that it can now deliver a simple and quick self-service option for business customers who have coin in their business lodgements. Finally, through the partnership with An Post, AIB customers can also make lodgements, including coin, to their accounts in c.1,100 An Post Offices across the country.

(*Note: AIB has 6 tellerless outlets that cannot accept coin lodgements)”

Bank of Ireland:

“Bank of Ireland has the largest footprint of any individual bank with c.250 branches in the Republic of Ireland, approximately 60% of which accept coin lodgements. We have a comprehensive multichannel distribution platform, combining branch, app, online, and phone banking. The way in which our customers choose to bank is more diverse than ever which is why we provide a multichannel distribution platform. Only 3% of customers' total transactions are conducted over the counter and every month we have more than 14 million customer interactions on the mobile and tablet app, online, and on the telephone.”

Permanent TSB:

“Permanent TSB branches are open Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. Approximately 20% of branches also open until 8pm on Thursdays and from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays. The Bank's full cashier facilities are available in all 77 branches from 10am to 3pm, Monday to Friday and branches accept cash and coin lodgements from all customers. In a small number

of branches, the Bank has local arrangements, whereby customers with large coin volumes will lodge at certain times during the day, in such cases, this would be agreed in advance with these customers.”

Mortgage Interest Relief Data

234. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of the 419,400 mortgages in receipt of mortgage interest relief that are in the 2004 to 2008 30% cohort and in the 2009 to 2012 15% cohort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39014/17]

235. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of couples in receipt of the higher ceilings of the 2004 to 2008 30% cohort in receipt of mortgage interest relief; the number that are single persons in receipt of lower ceilings; if he will provide the same data for the 2009 to 2012 15% cohort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39015/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 and 235 together.

I am informed by Revenue that the following tables set out the number of loans qualifying for mortgage interest relief (MIR) broken down by rate and ceiling of relief.

The data are based on the numbers of loans qualifying for relief as at 31 December 2016. As is apparent from the tables, the vast majority of relief is now granted at the 15% and 30% rates of relief and at the lower €3,000 and €6,000 ceilings.

A breakdown by numbers of individuals/couples at the various rates and ceilings of relief is not available due to the manner in which the data are returned to Revenue.

Distribution of Loans by Rate

Rate	Number of Loans
15%	130,033
20%	12,982
22.5%	1,852
25%	11
30%	147,570
TOTAL	292,448

Distribution of Loans by Ceiling

Ceiling	Number of Loans
3,000	125,101
6,000	150,808
10,000	9,145
20,000	7,394
TOTAL	292,448

Question No. 236 answered with Question No. 99.

Tax Exemptions

237. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the annual cost of reducing the seven-year capital gains tax exemption under section 604A to five years and four years, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39017/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the exemption from capital gains tax referred to by the Deputy applies to land and buildings acquired in the period commencing on 7 December 2011 and ending on 31 December 2014, which are held for a minimum period of seven years. Accordingly, the earliest date that properties acquired in the relevant period can qualify for the exemption will be 7 December 2018. Estimating the potential cost of reducing the holding period as suggested by the Deputy is challenging as accurate information is not available on lands and buildings bought during the period and the consequent potential capital gains tax liability that would qualify for the relief is also dependent on the timing of future sales.

Questions Nos. 238 to 240, inclusive, answered with Question No. 230.

Universal Social Charge Data

241. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the first year and full year costs of decreasing the non-PAYE USC surcharge from 3% to 2.5%; the number of persons affected by such a change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39021/17]

242. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of self-employed persons that will benefit from an increase in the earned income tax credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39022/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241 and 242 together.

As regards the earner income tax credit, I am advised by Revenue that, for 2016, the latest year for which data are available, the estimated number of self employed taxpayer units that benefit from the tax credit in 2016 is around 152,000. Individuals or married persons/civil partners who have elected (or who have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment) are counted as one tax unit. Final estimates will be available in mid-2018 once tax returns for 2016 are filed and processed.

As regards the USC surcharge, I am advised by Revenue that estimated first and full year costs of decreasing the surcharge on non-PAYE income over €100,000 from 3% to 2.5% are €16 million and €28 million respectively. The estimated number of persons affected by this change is around 15,600. These estimates have been generated by reference to 2018 incomes as calculated on the basis of actual data for the year 2015, the latest year for which returns are available, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. The estimates are provisional and may be revised.

Tax Yield

243. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the first year and full year cost of decreasing VRT for category B motor caravans and motor homes from 13.3% to 6.65% and to 0%, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39023/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated cost of decreasing VRT for category B motor caravans and motor homes from 13.3% to 6.65% and to 0% is €1.5m and €3m respectively in a full year.

Question No. 244 answered with Question No. 196.

Garda Stations

245. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the fitting of cell windows that do not conform to standards set by the OPW; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37113/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) takes the safety and welfare of all users of Garda cells, and of OPW-managed buildings generally, very seriously. I can confirm that OPW has no reason to believe that the specification and installation of cell windows at the project sites you mentioned are not in accordance with the appropriate standards. However, OPW is continuing to look into the matter to establish whether there is any basis to the allegations and whether any action is necessary in order to confirm compliance with the relevant specifications.

Pension Provisions

246. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to change the policy of pensions ceasing on the demise of former HSE employees to allow the pension to pass to the spouse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37121/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My responsibility as Minister is for the Civil Service Pension Schemes, though I am also responsible for the development of general policy on occupational pension schemes in the wider public service.

The HSE, in common with most public service employers, operates a spouses' and children's contributory pension scheme, which provides benefits to the spouses and children of deceased members. In general, when a member dies after retirement, a spouse's pension of one-half of the former member's pension is payable. Dependent children are also entitled to a child's pension, the rate of which will depend on whether or not a spouse's pension is being paid and also on the number of eligible children. Spouses' and children's pensions are also payable in the case of death in service.

Under the provisions of the Superannuation Act 1956, there is a facility in the Established Civil Service Superannuation Scheme which enables a civil servant, at retirement, to surrender part of their pension so as to provide a separate pension for their spouse and/or dependent relatives.

The primary purpose of the facility is to allow an officer to make some provision for their families, particularly after their death. Although the facility is still available to civil servants, its use has sharply declined since the introduction of spouses' and children's pensions.

There is no provision in the Health Service Executive Employee Superannuation Scheme, 2010 (S.I. No. 362/2010) for allocating/surrendering of portion of pension. Therefore, employees recruited by the HSE would not have this provision. However, those employees of former Health Boards who were previously members of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme may still have access to this provision.

I have no plans to review the policy in relation to public service spouses' and children's contributory pension schemes at present.

Flood Prevention Measures

247. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans and the timeframe for flood defences in the St. Mary's area of Limerick city (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37321/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Limerick City and County Council (LCCC) is the Contracting Authority for the initial phase of the flood relief scheme for Limerick city at King's Island which includes an advance contract for works at Verdant Place.

LCCC advises that works currently underway at Verdant Place involve the construction of a flood defence wall. The wall extends from Thomond Bridge to St Mary's Community Centre, over a distance of 250 metres. This is Phase 1 of the King's Island flood relief works and was advanced in late 2016 due to recurring flooding at this location. The works on Verdant place are well advanced and are nearing completion.

The remainder of the King's Island flood relief works, including the area referred to by the Deputy, will encompass the entire King's Island over a distance of 3,000 metres. Consultants are currently finalising the Options Assessment Report on the remainder of the King's Island works. This report is due shortly and it is expected that a planning application for the remainder of the works will be lodged with An Bord Pleanála by the Council before the end of 2017. The timing of commencement of construction works will depend on planning approval.

Public Sector Pensions

248. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his position with regard to the mandatory retirement age in both the public service and private sector; the difficulties being faced by many retiring civil servants and public sector workers when they must retire at 65 years of age yet cannot access a pension until 66 years of age; if he will consider amending legislation in order to allow persons to be able to work until 66 years of age if they so wish; his views on whether the issue needs to be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37437/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): An Interdepartmental Working Group, chaired by my Department was established in 2016 to examine the issues arising from prevailing retirement ages for workers in both the public and private sectors, in the context of the current age of entitlement to the State Pension and the scheduled increases to the State Pension age in 2021 and 2028.

The Group, whose Report was agreed by Government in August 2016, considered policy around retirement age in both the public and private sectors, examining implications arising from retirement ages now and in the future. The Group identified a set of framework principles to underpin policy in the area and made a number of recommendations assigned to Government Departments and Employer bodies for follow-up in that regard. A copy of the Report is available online at www.per.gov.ie/en/report-of-the-interdepartmental-group-on-fuller-working-lives.

In respect of the public service, and on foot of one of the recommendations of the aforementioned Report, my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked with reviewing the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension. In the context of the review, which is well advanced, meetings were held with employers from all public service sectors, including the civil service, local authority and health sectors, supplemented by further interactions and discussions with the employers.

Future policy in this area will be considered by Government following the outcome of the review.

Any change in the compulsory retirement ages for public servants would require primary legislation.

National Monuments

249. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount his Department spent on each of the 14 national monuments in County Carlow in each of the years 2012 to 2016. [37519/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works care for fourteen National Monuments in County Carlow. The sites are visited on a regular basis by OPW workstaff and general maintenance is undertaken as necessary.

The frequency of visits is dependent on the type of structure and its location eg, Agade is visited on a bi-annual basis while those sites where grass-cutting is required or are situated nearer areas of denser population (where usage levels are higher) are visited on a more regular basis. There are no concerns in relation to the condition of the National Monuments in the Carlow area and as such, it was not necessary to undertake conservation works at these sites in the years referred to by the Deputy.

General maintenance costs are not broken down on a site-by-site basis as this work is undertaken the direct workforce of the Kilkenny National Monuments Depot and is a charge on that Depots operational budget. Therefore, it is not possible to provide a breakdown as requested by Mr Deering.

National Monuments

250. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to extend permits to land on Skellig island (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37565/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The visitor season at Skellig Michael runs from approx. mid May until the end September/start of October, depending on weather and sea conditions.

As has been stated many times previously, it has not been possible to open the visitor season earlier in the year because a significant amount of essential work has to be done in the period immediately prior to the official opening. During this period, the site needs to be made ready to receive visitors and have significant Health and Safety preparations for the season carried out. In particular, the site needs to be fully assessed after the winter, any hazards cleared from public

areas and any necessary repairs carried out. These essential preparatory works are absolutely necessary in advance of opening the island to the public. The Deputy will be well aware I am sure that there are regular rockfalls on the island and considerable time and attention is required to deal with them.

The island has gained somewhat of a greater profile in recent times and it is quite clear that there is a buoyant tourist interest in the area which already enjoys a good deal of visitor traffic associated with the Wild Atlantic Way/Ring of Kerry. However, it must be appreciated that the island itself has an extremely limited capacity to deal with large numbers of visitors, dictated not just by the weather and the availability of boats, but also by the fragility of the island and the impact large volumes of visitors can have on the sensitive historic structures there. As a result, it is clear that visitor numbers will continue to be directly controlled and it is likely as a result that not all who wish to visit will be able to make the trip.

Understanding that Skellig Michael is often unavailable to visitors even during the period that the island is officially open because of bad weather and recognising that there will be a number of tourists who are not able to visit, the OPW has, together with Fáilte Ireland and local Tourism interests, been developing alternative cultural tourism options in the immediate area which are not so weather dependant and which can be enjoyed by visitors without the need for an expensive and sometimes uncomfortable boat trip. This measure, as well as taking some visitor pressure off the island, will also have the benefit of spreading the economic benefit of these tourists to other locations and prolonging visitor dwelltime in the area. I have asked my officials in the OPW to keep the arrangements for the annual opening of the Skellig Michael site under review and, in the context of the 2018 season, to analyse the position fully again.

Public Sector Pay

251. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of civil servants on contracts pre-1995 who have had their pay affected by the introduction of PeoplePoint (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37774/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) (Amendment) Act 2013 provides that I, as the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, can make regulations for a Public Service Sick Leave Scheme. These Regulations are contained in SI 124 of 2014 and SI 384 of 2015. The Regulations set out the terms for the granting of paid sick leave, including that Medical Certificates be provided.

PeoplePoint is the HR and Pensions Administration Shared Service Centre that carries out the administration functions related to HR and Pensions for the Civil Service, applying the Government's HR and pension policies and procedures.

The role of PeoplePoint in the administration of sick leave is set out in the sick leave circular, Circular 12/2015 Arrangements for Paid Sick Leave. It states that PeoplePoint delivers the transactional elements of sick leave policy for those organisations within the HR Shared Service.

Public Sector Staff Data

252. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of public servants now employed; the number of vacancies in the public service; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [37811/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As of the end of the second quarter of 2017, based on the information provided to my Department overall public service employment was 311,215 in Full-Time Equivalence terms. As the Deputy may be aware, in Budget 2015, the Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion was formally ended and the Employment Control Framework was replaced by a new Delegated Sanction Arrangement in most Government Departments and Offices. Under the new delegated arrangement, each Government Department and Office is given a fixed multi-annual pay ceiling and, subject to compliance with Workforce Planning requirements and some restrictions related to senior appointments, has had delegated authority to determine staffing needs and fill vacancies once they remain within their pay ceiling. Departments can also implement similar cascade arrangements with agencies or bodies under their aegis. The information requested by the Deputy in relation to vacancies in the public service is not, therefore, held centrally by my Department. The Delegated Sanction Arrangements now in place are intended to enable a more responsive approach in public bodies to the management of their human resources, in particular frontline personnel, in responding to service needs.

Public Sector Pensions

253. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the Government has not implemented Labour Court recommendation 19293 which recommended the provision of a pension for community employment supervisors; the progress of the community sector high level forum in dealing with this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37930/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Community Sector High Level Forum was reconvened in 2015 and met most recently on 7th April 2017, to give consideration to the issues to which the Deputy refers.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

In considering the matter, I must have regard to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A costings exercise is currently being progressed by officials in my Department and should be completed later this year.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

254. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on his Department's work on allocating additional resources for infrastructure investment in view of the Taoiseach's decision to abandon the 45% debt to GDP ratio; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38038/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government set out its position in relation to the Debt Target in the 2017 Summer Economic Statement (SES) which was published in July. In this context, the planned debt to GDP target has not been abandoned rather it has been revised on an interim basis to 55 per cent which, in fact, falls below Ireland's obligations under the Stability and Growth Pact to reach 60 per cent which is

expected to be achieved in 2022 as before. Thereafter, and once major capital projects have been completed, the Government will target a further reduction in the debt ratio to 45% of GDP.

This recalibration of the Debt Target will enable the Government to deliver additional medium-term fiscal flexibility to increase capital expenditure enhancing the capacity of the economy to continue to grow in a sustainable manner in the future.

The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to additional capital investment over the period of the Capital Plan to 2021, to be allocated on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan. As set out in the Summer Economic Statement 2017, Government will invest a further €4.1 billion in key infrastructure supporting economic and social progress. This is in addition to the extra €2.2b in Exchequer funding already allocated to housing under Rebuilding Ireland.

The publication of the report of the review of the Capital Plan is a key milestone in terms of the Government's commitment to increase public capital investment and to maintain and enhance Ireland's public capital stock. The report contains a comprehensive update on public capital investment priorities based on detailed research by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, engagement with all Departments and a public consultation. The review sets out the detailed analysis and evidence which will help inform decisions by Government, in the context of Budget 2018, on the allocation of the additional resources now available for increased public investment.

The report also sets the context for the preparation of a new 10 year National Investment Plan, which will be integrated with, and support the implementation of, the new National Planning Framework.

Cross-Border Co-operation

255. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cross-Border bodies which receive Government funding; the corresponding amount paid in each of the years 2010 to 2016, in tabular form; and the amount allocated for 2017. [38514/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government provides funding for the Six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement (Waterways Ireland, SafeFood, InterTradeIreland, SEUPB, the Languages Bodies, and the Loughs Agency) along with Tourism Ireland Limited.

Ireland's expenditure outturn, rounded to the nearest euro, for the NSIBs for 2010-16, along with their allocations for 2017, are set out in the following table:

Body	Sponsor Dept	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*
An Foras Teanga	DCHG	€16,431,876	€15,872,300	€15,397,309	€14,442,968	€13,469,372	€13,467,869	€13,249,411	€13,989,000
Intertrade Ireland	DBEI	€7,848,001	€6,637,662	€8,164,021	€8,106,162	€7,761,983	€7,839,919	€7,560,000	€7,960,000
Loughs Agency	DCCA	€2,187,985	€2,592,547	€2,765,208	€2,296,580	€2,601,693	€2,735,496	€2,499,661	€2,705,000
SafeFood	DOH	€6,665,400	€5,950,000	€5,250,000	€5,950,000	€5,712,000	€5,474,000	€5,236,000	€5,236,000
SEUPB	DPER	€1,122,000	€1,168,000	€1,226,000	€1,164,000	€1,075,000	€1,249,000	€1,200,000	€1,350,000
Tourism Ireland	DTTAS	€48,982,000	€51,948,000	€45,831,000	€44,294,000	€43,623,000	€40,750,000	€39,536,000	€41,307,000
Waterways Ireland	DCHG	€32,919,000	€30,300,000	€27,099,000	€25,463,000	€24,183,000	€24,451,000	€26,567,000	€24,859,000

Capital Expenditure Programme

256. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the capital investment and investment in education, health and child care, respectively, as a percentage of the GNI* data as opposed to GDP for the most recent year available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36893/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The latest published figures available for GNI* are for 2016.

The figures outlined in the table below demonstrate the substantial level of investment which was made in these public services in 2016.

As Ireland's economic growth is maintained on the basis of the Government's prudent and responsible approach to fiscal policy and in keeping with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to increase investment in public services, the Government has increased investment in all of these sectors in 2017. Indeed, the health allocation of €14.1 billion included in Budget 2017 means that spending this year will exceed its 2009 peak, both in total and per capita. Furthermore, as outlined in the 2017 Summer Economic Statement, public capital investment will increase by over 70% over the next four years to almost €7.8 billion by 2021.

In addition, as highlighted by the recent Spending Review, as far as current spending is concerned, and in the Committee on Budgetary Oversight's recent report on infrastructure and capital investment it is important that all public spending is undertaken on a value-for-money basis.

€ million	2016	As a share of GNI*
Total Gross Voted Capital Expenditure	4,107	2.17%
Gross Voted Expenditure by the Children and Youth Affairs Group	1,063	0.56%
Gross Voted Expenditure by the Education & Skills Group	8,327	4.40%
Gross Voted Expenditure by the Health Group	13,649	7.22%

Note: GNI* for 2016 is €189,163 million.

Source: DPER Databank (<http://databank.per.gov.ie/>), CSO National Income and Expenditure Annual Results 2016 - Annex 1 (www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/nie/niear2016/).

Departmental Staff Data

257. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36958/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that the information provided in the following document is in respect of political staff who featured on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reforms payroll. Since the 31st Dail, Personal and Secretarial Assistants working in Constituency Offices are employed by the Oireachtas and not on individual department payrolls.

In the years 2015 to May 2016 there were 6 political staff employed by my predecessor Deputy Brendan Howlin and in the table the Deputy will find a list of their roles and annual salaries.

As a result of a change in Government in May 2016, Minister of State Eoghan Murphy joined my department. Minister Eoghan Murphy had a dual portfolio with duties for both the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and Department of Finance. As a result of this both my Department and the Department of Finance, split all costs associated with the staff in the offices of the Minister of State. The figure shown is the full cost of each of these staff.

The most recent cabinet reshuffle in June saw Minister of State, Patrick O Donovan join my department.

June 2017 - Present		
Minister Paschal Donohoe		
Role	Salary	Office
Special Adviser	€88,392.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Special Adviser	€88,392.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€35,699.99	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€35,699.99	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Minister of State, Patrick O Donovan		
Role	Salary	Office
Civilian Driver	€35,699.99	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€35,699.99	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Public Servant on Seconded	€42,548.00	Constituency Office
May 2016 - June 2016		
Minister Paschal Donohoe		
Role	Salary	Office
Special Adviser	€82,587.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Special Adviser	€82,587.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Civilian Driver	€34,699.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€34,699.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Minister of State, Eoghan Murphy		
Role	Salary	Office
Special Adviser	€57,614.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€34,699.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€34,699.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
2015 - May 2016		
Minister Brendan Howlin		
Role	Salary	Office
Special Adviser	€87,258.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Special Adviser	€106,880.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Personal Secretary	€47,755.14	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Personal Assistant	€54,490.00	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€32,964.72	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Civilian Driver	€32,964.72	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Flood Risk Management

258. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the flood risk management plans, including the eastern CFRAM, have been finalised; if they have been submitted to him for approval; the additional studies to be undertaken in respect of the further examination of flooding at Hazelhatch and Celbridge, County Kildare; when these studies will be undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37033/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding is the Office of Public Works (OPW) Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of Flood Risk Management Plans.

The current position is that the OPW, having reviewed and taken account of the submissions received during public and statutory consultation, has finalised three of the four Flood

Risk Management Plans for the Eastern CFRAM Study area. These have been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for independent review of the environmental assessments. The fourth Plan, is being reviewed by the OPW together with its engineering consultants and Fingal County Council, prior to submitting to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, for independent environment review in the coming weeks.

Once this independent review is completed and observations addressed, the final Plans will be formally submitted to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for approval, in accordance with the statutory requirements for approval of the Plans.

I aim by the end of this year to seek approval from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans developed by the national CFRAM Programme. These Plans will inform Government's prioritised approach to further develop over 100 major flood defence schemes and investment to those that deliver feasible protection against significant floods risks.

With regards to further flood relief studies of Hazelhatch and Celbridge, in Co. Kildare, officials from the OPW met with officials from Kildare County Council and have confirmed that resources will be available to assist Kildare County Council to take the study forward, once the Flood Risk Management Plans are approved. In the meantime, work by OPW engineers to install additional Hydrometric Gauges in the Hazelhatch and Celbridge areas have commenced and will be completed shortly. The data gathered will help inform and facilitate further studies in the area.

Tourism Capital Investment Programme

259. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if additional funding will be provided under the capital review for the tourism capital development programme; his plans for the phase 2 restoration works to Maynooth Castle, Maynooth, County Kildare, if additional funding is provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37037/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to additional capital investment over the period of the Capital Plan to 2021, to be allocated on the basis of the outcome of the review of the plan. Following the Summer Economic Statement 2017, Government plans to invest an additional €4.1 billion in key infrastructure supporting economic and social progress.

As part of the review of the Capital Plan, submissions were received from Departments and a public consultation process was also undertaken by my Department. The Deputy will appreciate that it is a matter for each Department, in the first instance, to identify its sectoral priorities and projects in their submission for any additional funding under the review.

Analysis carried out as part of the review includes an infrastructure capacity and demand analysis which will help inform decisions by Government in the context of Budget 2018 on the allocation of the available resources. Any decisions on the capital allocations will not be made until after that process is completed at Budget-time.

Departmental Correspondence

260. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status

of a reply to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37040/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): A reply to this correspondence issued on 25th August 2017.

The reply confirms that the OPW inspected the bridge in question. While the bridge crosses a watercourse maintained by the OPW, the structure is privately owned and the Office of Public Works has no maintenance responsibility for this bridge.

Civil Service Staff Data

261. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual percentage of Civil Service staff who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37060/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The percentages by gender of civil service staff for the years 2010 to end-June 2017 are set out as follows.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Female	58.4%	58.9%	59.8%	60.1%	60.3%	60.4%	56.6%	56.5%
Male	41.6%	41.1%	40.2%	39.9%	39.7%	39.6%	43.4%	43.5%

Public Sector Staff Data

262. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37061/17]

263. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the annual percentage of non-commercial State sponsored bodies' staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37062/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 263 together.

In response to the Deputy's questions, the following table outlines the annual percentage of staff that were women in my Department and the bodies under its aegis, since the Department was established in 2011. It should be noted that a number of the bodies were only established in the period since 2011.

Annual percentage of staff that were women 2011-2017

Questions - Written Answers

Organisa-tion	2011%	2012%	2013%	2014%	2015%	2016%	2017(to date)%
Depart-ment of Public Expendi-ture and Reform	50	54	53	54	51	51	52
National Shared Services Office	N/a	55	56	62	61	61	61
Office of Gov-ernment Procure-ment	N/a	N/a	N/a	46	49	44	42
Office of Public Works	29	30	30	30	31	32	31
Public Appoint-ments Service	73	75	76	75	76	73	70
State Labora-tory	51	52	52	56	58	55	55
Office of the Om-budsman	48	49	48	47	50	49	50
Institute of Public Adminis-tration	64	64	63	66	67	66	62
Special EU Pro-grammes Body	66	63	65	62	61	61	61
National Lottery Regulator	N/a	N/a	N/a	0	11	22	27

Departmental Staff Data

264. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will include a breakdown of staff by gender within his Department's online databank public sector numbers dataset. [37063/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department collects quarterly information on Public Service staff numbers and pay which is set out

in the databank available on the Department's website. Other than in relation to the civil service, the aggregate-level data provided to my Department does not currently extend to a detailed breakdown of public service workforce characteristics, including on the basis of gender. Consideration is currently being given by my Department to expanding to scope of human resource data collated on a centralised basis subject to compliance with data sharing and data protection requirements as appropriate.

Departmental Staff Data

265. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of men and women, respectively, who have participated to date in the senior public service executive leadership programme and the principal officer level leadership programme. [37064/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In recognition of the need to improve gender diversity at senior levels, a target of equal representation was set for participation on the Senior Public Service (SPS) and Principal Officer Executive Leadership programmes. Ten female and ten male participants were selected for the SPS level programme. The Principal Officer level initiative has 21 female and 19 male participants on the programme.

Economic and Social Research Institute

266. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide the Economic and Social Research Institute research commissioned in 2017 as part of the new initiatives for achieving gender balance in the Civil Service. [37065/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): One of the actions set out in the Civil Service Renewal Plan is to improve gender balance at each level by reviewing supports and policies to ensure these are impactful and measurable. This action is particularly important at senior management levels in the Civil Service where women are under-represented. I announced a series of initiatives earlier this year for achieving gender balance in the Civil Service including research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) based on the 2015 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.

The ESRI is currently finalising this research report and when finalised it will be published and made available on my Department's website. At that stage, the Deputy can be provided with a copy of the report.

Departmental Staff Data

267. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of women and men, respectively, employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37075/17]

268. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of men and women, respectively, in his Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37086/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

Please find below in table 1, information on the number of women and men employed in my Department, the National Shared Services Office and the Office of Government Procurement. These figures are based on the number of staff in each organisation as of 31st August 2017.

Table 2 provides information on the numbers of men and women employed in my Department, the National Shared Services Office and the Office of Government Procurement who hold the posts referred to by the Deputy. The figures are based on the number of staff employed in each organisation as of 31st August 2017.

Table 1

Department	Female Headcount	Male Headcount	Total
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	207	190	397
Office of Government Procurement	84	118	202
National Shared Services Office	440	280	720

Table 2

Department of Public Expenditure			
Grade/Level	Female Headcount	Male Headcount	Total
Secretary General	0	1	1
Second Secretary	0	0	0
Deputy Secretary	1	0	1
Assistant Secretary/ Director	4	4	8
Principal	14	19	33
Assistant Principal	52	53	105
Office of Government Procurement			
Grade/Level	Female Headcount	Male Headcount	Total
Secretary General	0	0	0
Second Secretary	0	0	0
Deputy Secretary/ CEO	0	1	1
Assistant Secretary/ Director	0	1	1
Principal	8	6	14
Assistant Principal	19	26	45
National Shared Services Office			
Grade/Level	Female Headcount	Male Headcount	Total
Secretary General	0	0	0

Second Secretary	0	0	0
Deputy Secretary/ CEO	1	0	1
Assistant Secretary	2	0	2
Principal	2	2	4
Assistant Principal	20	9	29

Flood Risk Management

269. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the draft flood risk management plans for at risk areas (details supplied) will be approved, implemented and adopted by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37122/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The core strategy for addressing areas at potentially significant risk from flooding is the Office of Public Works (OPW) Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The Programme, which is being undertaken by engineering consultants on behalf of the OPW working in partnership with the local authorities, involves the production of predictive flood mapping for each location, the development of preliminary flood risk management options and the production of Flood Risk Management Plans. The catchment area referred to by the Deputy is part of one of four study areas under the Eastern CFRAM Study.

The OPW has reviewed the draft Plan for this area including taking account of the submissions received during public and statutory consultation. This Plan was, on 11th August 2017, submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for independent review of the environmental assessments. Once this independent review of all 29 Plans is completed and observations addressed, the final Plans will be formally submitted to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for approval, in accordance with the statutory requirements for approval of the Plans.

I aim by the end of this year to seek approval from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform for the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans developed by the national CFRAM Programme. These Plans will inform Government's prioritised approach to further develop over 100 major flood defence schemes and investment to those that deliver feasible protection against significant floods risks. The Plans will then be forwarded to the Local Authorities that may adopt the Plans for their respective areas.

Departmental Expenditure

270. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37228/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, the following table outlines the cost of bank charges (including for credit cards) in each of the past five years:

Institution	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
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Bank of Ireland, VISA	€186	€186	€186	€294	€342
Danske Bank	€167	€354	€460	€446	€427
Fexco			€11		
Total	€353	€540	€657	€740	€769

Brexit Issues

271. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has conducted an up to date assessment of the impact that the uncertainty regarding Brexit will have on the PEACE funds which is important in Border areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37653/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can assure the Deputy that I fully appreciate the uncertainty that Brexit has caused, not just for the PEACE programme but also for INTERREG. Over the last quarter of a century the two programmes have made an enormous contribution to cross-Border cooperation, and they remain important drivers of regional development in a cross-Border context. Last December I travelled to Derry where, along with the then Northern Ireland Finance Minister, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, I had the opportunity to see the impact that the Programmes are having on the ground.

Even before that, however, I was pleased to be able to announce that agreement had been reached between my Department and the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland on a safeguard clause for funding agreements with programme beneficiaries. The objective of the agreement is to Brexit-proof Letters of Offer to the greatest extent possible and to give programme beneficiaries assurance as to the legal and financial commitments they are entering into, so they can plan for the future with confidence.

Now that that first objective has been achieved, my medium term objective is to ensure the successful implementation of the current programmes out to 2020, through a period during which the UK is expected to leave the EU. My longer term objective is secure agreement for successor programmes post-2020. Work is under way in my Department to address these medium and long term objectives.

Departmental Properties

272. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the acquisition of a building (details supplied); the timeframe for the conclusion of proceedings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37836/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The OPW and the CSSO continue to progress the acquisition of the site in question and expect the process to reach a conclusion shortly.

In view of the Deputy's repeated interest and questioning on the matter, I can advise that any change in circumstances could be made available to her or she may wish to contact my Office directly.

Proposed Legislation

273. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will report on the development of legislation for the regulation of data sharing between public bodies and for applicable safeguards and conditions regarding the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37884/17]

298. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update on the data-sharing and governance Bill; if this Bill is planned to underpin the sharing of PSI information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39004/17]

299. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to the proposed data-sharing and governance Bill, the information it is envisioned this Bill will allow An Garda Síochána to request; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39005/17]

300. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an assurance can be given in respect of the security and confidentiality of the data held on the public services card and other personal information shared and accessed by Government Departments and their agencies; the legal sanctions which apply to breaches or misuse of this data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39009/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 273 and 298 to 300, inclusive, together.

On 7th July 2015, the Government approved the drafting of the Data-Sharing and Governance Bill. The Government's objective in bringing forward the General Scheme was to promote data sharing between public bodies for legitimate and clearly specified purposes and to improve transparency for individual rights by setting new governance standards for sharing of data between public bodies.

The Bill aims to facilitate an "ask-once, use-many" times principle, that is, a person will only be asked for their information once, but the information can be shared within the public service for the provision of other services. The intention is to significantly reduce the administrative burden on citizens and businesses and allow them to avail of higher-quality, more efficient and seamless public services. Data sharing will help Ireland align very closely with EU eGovernment and Digital Single Market developments as well as complementing national eGovernment initiatives such as the transformation of our "back office" processes and the development of a Digital Services Gateway.

The Bill takes account of and will help compliance with data protection law and the General Data Protection Regulation which takes effect in May 2018 in that data subject rights under data protection law must be complied with in the sharing of data in terms of consent, proportionality, transparency etc. Significant governance and transparency measures are proposed, including a clear definition of data sharing and the purposes for which data may be shared, governance arrangements which public bodies must comply with before disclosure of information to another public body, and obligations to enter into Data Sharing Agreements and for the publication of such Agreements, and the laying of them before the Houses of the Oireachtas. My colleague Minister O'Donovan proposes to bring proposals to Government shortly to further strengthen the governance and transparency arrangements in the Bill with a view to, *inter alia*, making it easier for citizens to know who holds their data and how it is being used.

The Bill concluded pre-legislative scrutiny in the Houses of the Oireachtas in May 2017. My officials are currently considering the report in the context of the drafting of the Bill and are working closely with the Office of the Attorney General. The drafting of the Bill has been substantially progressed since the publication of the General Scheme and I expect the Bill will be published in the Autumn.

Regarding the Public Services Card, the personal data processed as part of the registration and issuance of the card by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is legislated for in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended. The personal data processed in relation to the card form the basic data that can be used to identify an individual, such as name, date of birth, personal public service number, gender, address and information of any other type is not processed in this context.

The sharing of the data held on the card is also legislated for in the above Act, permitting the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to share this basic personal data for the purposes of authenticating an individual's identity. The Minister may only share such data for this purpose with bodies that are specifically listed within Schedule 5 of the above Act. Furthermore, the body receiving such data must also have a legal basis for the processing of the data in its own right as per the data protection Acts. Lastly, the data collected and processed as part of the Public Services Card registration and issuance process is controlled by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and as such has and adheres to the responsibilities of a Data Controller as set out in the Data Protection Acts.

As regards sharing of other personal data, under the existing legal framework, data-sharing provisions are included in specific Acts, based on the requirements of a particular Department or body. This legislation and data protection legislation must be complied with to allow such data sharing to occur.

Sanctions for misuse of data will depend on the particular circumstances but can be applied at organisational level or within Departments at personal level as appropriate.

Finally, Deputy Shortall asked what information is envisioned that An Garda Síochána might request under this Bill. The Deputy may be concerned about data processing for the purpose of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of crime. I wish to assure the Deputy that no specific provisions are provided in the Bill relating to information that An Garda Síochána might request. The forthcoming Data Protection Bill will transpose Directive (EU) 2016/680 of 27 April 2016 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by competent authorities, including the Gardaí, for the purposes of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties into national law. That Bill will, *inter alia*, regulate the sharing of personal data between competent authorities for those purposes.

Prison Service Staff

274. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a grade in the Civil Service for prison clerical officers or is such a post specific to the Prison Service; if the prison clerical officers are employed in line with general Civil Service clerical officers in view of the fact that Civil Service clerical officers receive overtime, flexi time, term time and so on, none of which is available to prison clerical officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37945/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is a grade for Prison Service Clerical Officers in the Prison Service. The purpose of this grade is to carry out the administrative and support duties necessary for a modern and efficient Prison Service. The introduction of the grade was consistent with legislation, regulations and Codes of Practice governing Civil Service recruitment. The granting of particular working arrangements such as overtime, flexitime etc. is at the discretion of civil service bodies, is determined by organisational requirements and subject to local management.

Flood Relief Schemes

275. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the plans the OPW has to prevent further flooding in Tullig Mor and Tullig Beg, Ballinhassig, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37951/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is preparing a preliminary report to outline a preferred flood relief option and initial cost and benefit analysis for Ballinhassig.

An information meeting was held with residents of Ballinhassig, Local Representatives and Cork County Council on the 16th of December 2016 at which it was highlighted that, given the particular soil characteristics in the area, there was a need to conduct a geotechnical investigation of the site and a geotechnical assessment regarding the seepage characteristics of the soil underlying the properties in Tullybeg, Ballinhassig.

The progression of the initial study and the cost of the project are dependent of the results of the geotechnical investigation. The OPW has recently received the preliminary results from these investigations and hopes to have the final report completed before the end of 2017. Following the completion of the report, the OPW will meet with the landowners and discuss the findings with a view to establishing a possible solution that can be progressed to a full feasibility study.

Brexit Staff

276. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37997/17]

277. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38013/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276 and 277 together.

The head of my Department's Brexit/EU/North South Unit is responsible for co-ordinating Brexit issues in the Department. The Principal-led Unit oversees Brexit work across the Department and acts as the contact point with the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other Government Departments. It is represented on the Brexit Senior Officials' Group and related groups, and supports me in my work on Brexit. The Unit currently comprises six staff.

Brexit issues are also addressed by staff in relevant areas across the Department. The cost of the Brexit/EU/North South Unit is met from within the Department's existing budget and is kept under review.

Construction Costs

278. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level

of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38029/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Assuming that the question relates to construction Price inflation, the tenders received by OPW reflect the trends as indicated in the Society of Chartered Surveyors Tender Price Index. This is “an independent assessment of construction tender prices in Ireland based on actual tender returns for non-residential projects”. The Index is a measure of average price increases across differing project types and locations.

Increases over the past 18 months are:

Year % Increase in Price

2016	5.92%
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The increase for the first half of 2017 is 3%. This is the latest figure available.

Arts Funding

279. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has received a request for additional funding for a project (details supplied) in Cork city in addition to the €12 million already committed by the Government; the process in order to assess such funding requests; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38115/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Cork Event Centre project was included in the Exchequer Stimulus package announced in Budget 2014. The project is being part-funded from the proceeds of the National Lottery licence transaction with an Exchequer grant of €12m being provided through the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Overall responsibility for the management and delivery of the project lies with Cork City Council, with Exchequer grant funding being administered through the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. As such, it is a matter for that Department to further assess the proposed additional project costs and to then seek this Department’s approval for any additional funding as considered necessary. My Department has not received any requests for additional funding for the project from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. I understand that Department is currently discussing the increased costs of the project with Cork City Council.

Insurance Coverage

280. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to facilitate the growing number of households that cannot get house insurance on their homes and properties in flood risk areas in view of difficulties being experienced by home owners throughout the State following flooding in recent years. [38121/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): While the Minister for Finance has overall responsibility for the Government’s

flood insurance policy, to assist insurance companies assess the risk and take into account the protection provided by completed OPW flood defence schemes, the OPW has a Memorandum of Understanding with Insurance Ireland, the representative body of the insurance industry. This Memorandum sets out principles of how the two organisations work together to ensure that appropriate and relevant information on these completed schemes is provided to insurers to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the availability to the public of insurance against the risk of flooding. Insurance Ireland members have committed to take into account all information provided by OPW when assessing exposure to flood risk within these protected areas. To date OPW has provided details to Insurance Ireland on 17 completed schemes nationally and Insurance Ireland surveys its members to ascertain the extent to which flood insurance cover is available in these areas. The results of the most recent survey indicated that 83% of property insurance policies in these areas include cover against flood risk.

In line with Action No. 270 of the Action Plan for Rural Development, the OPW and the Department of Finance are engaging with Insurance Ireland on a quarterly basis. In addition, the OPW and Insurance Ireland have established a sub group to explore the legal, technical and administrative arrangements that may allow for the further sharing of data on flood insurance cover for those 300 areas where the OPW has mapped the flood risk through the CFRAM Programme.

In light of my own experience, and in recognition of the importance of this issue, I met with members of Insurance Ireland last Friday, September 8th, along with Minister D'Arcy and our officials to impress upon all concerned parties the seriousness of this issue. I am satisfied that my officials will continue to work with Insurance Ireland on this matter to ensure that the insurance industry has the required knowledge with regard to OPW flood defence schemes to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the availability of insurance against the risk of flooding

The decision on whether to offer insurance, the levels of premiums charged and the policy terms applied are matters for individual insurers. Insurance companies make commercial decisions on the provision of insurance cover based on their assessment of the risks they would be accepting on a case-by-case basis.

The insurance industry has its own flood modelling tools for assessing the level of risk to individual properties and it has highlighted to the OPW that it does not use the OPW Flood Maps to inform its flood modelling.

Any person with an insurance-related query or complaint can contact Insurance Ireland's Insurance Information Service (01 676 1914 or iis@insuranceireland.eu). In addition, the Financial Services Ombudsman (1890 88 20 90) deals independently with unresolved complaints from consumers about their individual dealings with all financial service providers.

Public Services Card

281. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38153/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that neither my Department nor any of the bodies under its aegis have plans to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and produc-

tion of the Public Services Card.

The Public Services Card offers a standard way of identifying customers that will reduce the administrative burden both on the service providers and on the customers accessing the services. It is a matter for each Department to decide if and how the Public Services Card will be utilised for individual services. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and bodies under its aegis have no public services that require proof of personal identity.

The recently published eGovernment Strategy 2017-2020 lists a number of public services for which MyGovID/Public Services Card will be required in the future.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

282. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason community employment scheme supervisors are required to retire at 66 years of age in view of the fact the State advises that it does not have a role as an employer in this sector and employees are not public servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38226/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy points out, the employees concerned are not public servants. Questions relating to the Community Employment scheme and the State pension age should be addressed to my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

283. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress his Department has made in securing additional funds for infrastructure investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38621/17]

284. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the implementation of the capital plan in 2017 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38622/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 and 284 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government committed to additional capital investment over the period of the Capital Plan to 2021, to be allocated on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan. As set out in the Summer Economic Statement 2017, Government will invest a further €4.1 billion in key infrastructure supporting economic and social progress. This is in addition to the extra €2.2 billion in Exchequer funding already allocated to housing under Rebuilding Ireland.

The publication of the report of the review of the Capital Plan is a key milestone in terms of the Government's commitment to increase public capital investment and to maintain and enhance Ireland's public capital stock. The report contains a comprehensive update on public capital investment priorities based on detailed research by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, engagement with all Departments and a public consultation. The review sets out the detailed analysis and evidence which will help inform decisions by Government, in the context of Budget 2018, on the allocation of the additional resources now available for increased public investment.

The report also sets the context for the preparation of a new 10 year National Investment Plan, which will be integrated with, and support the implementation of, the new National Planning Framework.

Public Sector Pay

285. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to expedite the unwinding of FEMPI; the progress he has made in this respect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38623/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government concluded negotiations with the unions and associations representing public servants on the 8th of June this year, and the Workplace Relations Commission issued a set of proposals entitled the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020. This draft Agreement provides for the further phased unwinding of the FEMPI measures over a number of years.

The current position is that the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions will vote on the ratification of the Agreement on Monday. If the Agreement is ratified, the Government will shortly thereafter bring forward legislation to implement the relevant pay and pensions provisions.

Brexit Issues

286. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the development of sectoral response plans to Brexit; the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38699/17]

287. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38715/17]

288. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38731/17]

289. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38747/17]

290. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38763/17]

291. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38779/17]

292. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38811/17]

294. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38843/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286 to 292, inclusive, and 294 together.

Last May the Government published a document setting out in detail its approach and the structures it had put in place to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit. 'Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach' identifies key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations as well as the wider domestic response.

Within my Department this approach is reflected in the Department's Statement of Strategy for 2016-2019. The challenges posed by Brexit are kept under constant review and a dedicated Brexit/EU/North South Unit is responsible for co-ordinating the response to Brexit across the Department.

Reformed Cabinet Committee structures have now been put in place with a new Cabinet Committee devoted to EU Affairs, including Brexit, of which I am a member. My Department participates fully in the official level structures that support the work of the Cabinet Committee.

The significance of the risk arising from Brexit is reflected in the Government's National Risk Assessment 2017 and also in my Department's own risk register. In particular, the National Risk Assessment identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

The Government is also working to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations.

Across Government, work is continuing on Ireland's wider response to both the challenges and the opportunities posed by Brexit. This builds on ongoing cross-Government research and analysis, as well as stakeholder consultations.

Policy decisions in support of the Government's approach to Brexit arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

Brexit Staff

293. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38827/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Brexit issues in my Department are the responsibility of the Department's Brexit/EU/North South Unit. There are currently no posts vacant in the Unit.

Question No. 294 answered with Question No. 286.

Brexit Issues

295. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38859/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), for which my Department has responsibility, place a priority on stakeholder engagement through a variety of structures. A key feature of ESIF Programmes, including the cross-border PEACE and INTERREG programmes, is the Programme Monitoring Committees which are comprised not only of representatives of Government Departments and relevant public bodies, but also elected representatives and representatives of business, trade unions and civil society. A range of bodies also attend as observers. The Programme Monitoring Committees meet six monthly.

My Department is using these existing structures to engage with stakeholders in relation to the impact of Brexit on the PEACE and INTERREG programmes. The Programme Monitoring Committee for the INTERREG Programme met most recently on 6 September 2017, while the next meeting of the Programme Monitoring Committee for the PEACE Programme is due to take place on 29 November 2017.

My Department also engages with stakeholders through other fora, including the All Island Civic Dialogue process and related groups.

Brexit Issues

296. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38891/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has responsibility for the EU-funded cross-border programmes, PEACE and INTERREG. The Department has been working with the Managing Authority for the two programmes - the Special EU Programmes Body, one of the North South bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement - on the implications of Brexit for the Programmes. Research undertaken or commissioned by the SEUPB and the issue of publication of such research is a matter for discussion with the Northern Ireland Department of Finance, which is the joint Sponsor Department for the SEUPB and the programmes, along with my Department. No decision on publication has been made yet.

Departmental Expenditure

297. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38907/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report sets out the pre-Budget expenditure ceiling for my Ministerial Vote Group of €943 million for current expenditure and €176 million for capital expenditure. This represents the spending baseline for examination of my Department's budgetary priorities for

2018.

As outlined in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, the increases planned in expenditure for the delivery of public services are set at sustainable levels in order to ensure that the resources allocated are affordable both now and in the future. Consequently, it is important that there is an ongoing focus on the totality of Departmental spending and not just the incremental increase each year.

This was the context for this year's Spending Review which will support the consideration of existing expenditure alongside budgetary proposals during the Budget Estimates process. Where any savings are identified during the Estimates process they can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space. Work is ongoing in this regard in the context of the preparation of the Estimates for 2018 which will be announced at Budget-time.

Questions Nos. 298 to 300, inclusive, answered with Question No. 273.

Education and Training Boards

301. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties particularly in rural areas caused by the review of domestic travel and subsistence rates effective payable to members of education and training boards and statutory committees and that the new regime is creating difficulties in attracting suitable members from the community sector, in view of the fact that they find themselves out of pocket; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37257/17]

302. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated annual savings from the review of domestic travel and subsistence rates effective payable to members of education and training boards and statutory committees introduced on 1 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37258/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 301 and 302 together.

Travel & Subsistence arrangements for ETB Board and Committee members have been aligned with public sector norms in accordance with revised Department of Public Expenditure and Reform arrangements. This was the main driver of the revisions in the ETB sector as distinct from a requirement to achieve further savings.

These revised T&S arrangements took effect from 1 April 2017. The revised arrangements were also put in place across the public sector, including in the local authority sector, to which the ETBs have been traditionally linked. The T&S arrangements are outlined in Department Circular 0039/2017.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is not desirable to deviate from public sector norms in relation to travel and subsistence arrangements. However, my Department has indicated that it will be happy to receive feedback in due course on any effects arising from the changes after they have had time to bed in.

As each ETB is responsible for the payment of Travel & Subsistence to its members, my Department is not in a position to give an estimation regarding annual savings, if any, arising from the review of domestic travel and subsistence rates. The Deputy might also wish to note that some of the revised rates are higher than those applying heretofore.

Research Funding

303. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the decision by University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology to withdraw staffing and funding from the Irish marine and energy research cluster, IMERC, in Ringaskiddy, County Cork, (details supplied); and the future of the research facility, in view of this withdrawal by same. [38528/17]

429. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the decision by University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology to withdraw staffing and funding from the Irish marine and energy research cluster, IMERC, in Ringaskiddy, County Cork, (details supplied); and the future of the research facility, in view of this withdrawal by same. [38531/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 303 and 429 together.

I am aware of the decision by University College Cork (UCC) and Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) relating to the Irish Maritime and Energy Research Cluster (IMERC). However, neither my Department, nor the Higher Education Authority, were involved in the review or in the decisions by UCC and CIT.

IMERC was established in 2011 by UCC, CIT and the Irish Naval Service, to derive added value for Ireland and the Cork Harbour region in particular, from complementary strengths that each of the partners had developed. CIT had established the National Maritime College at Ringaskiddy; UCC had developed a broad suite of teaching and research programmes in Marine Energy and Biology; while the Naval Service, in collaboration with both academic institutions, had evolved a strategy to foster innovation in support of the economy.

IMERC was designed to facilitate collaboration among the partners to exploit opportunities for commercialisation of their outputs and services, to create jobs and to support marketing of the joint initiatives. Its incubation centre was established to accommodate start-up companies.

In March 2016 UCC and CIT commissioned an independent review of IMERC which reported in May 2016. Following the review, I understand that UCC and CIT subsequently decided to continue, but to segregate the different roles of IMERC:

- to refine and enhance the original Memorandum of Agreement to support collaboration in teaching and research, the fundamental missions of UCC and CIT, and;

- to engage with the local authority, the body already charged with economic development in Cork Harbour, on the role in exploiting the inward investment activities with continuing support from UCC, CIT and INS;

The IMERC Start-Up Incubation Facility, the 'Entrepreneurship', is now being managed jointly by UCC and CIT through existing structures, and the UCC staff members involved in IMERC are working in UCC.

English Language Training Organisations

304. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the new system for English language schools which cater for students outside the European Union has been put in place; if not, when it is expected to be activated; and if he will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [36801/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the Government decision of 19 May 2015 a series of reforms to the student immigration system for international education have been implemented.

These reforms include the introduction of a restricted list of education programmes considered to justify the granting of permission to non-EEA students to live and work in Ireland (known as the Interim List of Eligible Programmes – the ILEP).

As part of this process all providers of English language training wishing to recruit non-EEA students are required to apply to the Department of Justice and Equality for inclusion on the ILEP. Further details are available at the following: <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Interim%20List%20of%20Eligible%20Programmes%20-%20ILEP>.

The ILEP process is an interim measure until the introduction of the International Education Mark (IEM) for the provision of education to international learners, which will provide a full quality framework in the future.

Legislative amendments are necessary to facilitate the introduction of the IEM. These amendments are contained in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill. I published the General Scheme of this Bill on 15th May 2017, following approval by Government.

On 18th July 2017 the Joint Committee on Education and Skills determined that the Bill did not require pre-legislative scrutiny. The Bill has now been referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for the appointment of a legislative drafter.

It is anticipated that the Bill will be enacted in 2018, and this will enable the introduction of the IEM.

Third Level Funding

305. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the disparity whereby funding for third level universities is at 60% and institutes of technology receive 40%, in view of the fact that student figures are showing that 40% attend universities whereas 60% attend institutes of technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36795/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is responsible for gathering statistics on student numbers and according to the student numbers recorded by the HEA in respect of the 2016/17 academic year, there was 131,268 students attending universities and other colleges while 86,975 students attended Institutes of Technology (IoTs). This represents 60% for universities and colleges and 40% for IoTs. The numbers include undergraduate, postgraduate, full-time and part-time students.

In relation to the allocation of funding, the HEA has a Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) which allocates core funding to all HEA funded institutions (universities/specialist colleges/institutes of technology). The RGAM takes account of undergraduate and postgraduate provision in each institution weighted by the type of course being provided. This approach takes account of the fact that it is more costly to deliver courses in certain disciplines. For example, a largely lecture-based arts or business programme would generally be weighted at 1, a

programme which involves some practical or fieldwork would be weighted at 1.3 and lab-based provision is weighted at 1.7.

The HEA has recently undertaken a review of the RGAM which was led by an independent expert panel along with an Advisory Group that included representation from relevant stakeholders. The report, which is currently at final draft stage, will make recommendations on the most appropriate funding model for the future.

Teaching Council of Ireland

306. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the use of a courier service by the Teaching Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36808/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council is the statutory professional standards body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching. The Deputy is referring to an operational matter for the Teaching Council in which I have no role. In carrying out its functions, the Council is expected to adhere to public policy requirements on the efficient use of resources and in relation to procurement. The issue should be taken up directly with the Council.

Land Transfers

307. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made on the transfer of lands from a primary school (details supplied) to a GAA club to facilitate club and pitch development. [36874/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The matter referred to by the Deputy which followed a request from the GAA club is being considered by my Department.

My Department has been in recent correspondence with South Dublin County Council and intends to meet with the school authorities shortly with a view to facilitating arrangements.

Schools Building Projects Status

308. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the construction of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36887/17]

338. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school (details supplied) in Cootehill, County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37343/17]

360. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite the new project for a school (details supplied); the progress since July 2017 regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37863/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 308, 338 and 360 together.

The Stage 2(b) Detailed Design Report for the major building project at the school to which the Deputy refers has recently been reviewed by my Department and comments on the report issued to the Board of Management in July 2017. A response to these comments is awaited from the Board of Management and its Design Team.

In parallel, the Board of Management and its Design Team are currently finalising the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered.

Once these steps are finalised my Department will then revert to the school with a timeframe to proceed to tender and construction stage.

School Furniture Provision

309. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the cost of furniture will be provided for a school (details supplied). [36900/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to confirm that funding is being made available to the school to which the Deputy refers for replacement furniture. The school has been informed of my Department's decision.

School Enrolments Data

310. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of spare places in junior infants classes in each primary school in Swords and in the surrounding areas, including schools in the rural hinterland for the 2017-2018 school year; the waiting list for junior infants for each of these schools for the 2017-2018 school year; the way in which these figures compare to both the spare capacity and waiting lists for the 2016/2017 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36915/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware the pupil enrolments on 30 September is the key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level. In that regard, the enrolment position for the year 2017/18 will not be clarified in the area referred to until schools complete their enrolment process in the coming weeks.

A school's enrolment policy, and the question of waiting lists, is a matter for each individual school management. This information is not held within my Department. In that regard, however, it is understood that pupils on waiting lists in the area referred to may include applications for parents in respect of future years, e.g. 2018/19 etc..

In the case of both 2016/17 and 2017/18 my Department is satisfied that there were adequate junior infant places available to meet the requirement of the area.

Departmental Staff Data

311. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in

2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36951/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The following tabular statement contains the information requested by the Deputy.

In relation to the duties and role of each appointee, contract documents were laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in respect of those that were in situ 2015 and 2016 in accordance with the terms of the Ethics Acts where they can be viewed by the Deputy. Contract documents in respect of appointments made in 2017 when completed will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in due course.

The following tabular statements gives details of Ministerial Appointees and their respective salaries as at the 31st December in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017 as requested by the Deputy.

Ms Jan O’Sullivan, T.D. Minister for Education and Skills 11th July 2014 to 6th May 2016.

Appointee	Grade	Salary 2015
Neil Ward	Special Adviser	€78,670 pa
Paul Daly	Special Adviser	€81,676 pa
Joe Leddin	Personal Assistant	€54,490 pa
Margaret O’Donoghue	Personal Secretary	€47,744 pa
Gerard Tucker	Civilian driver	€32,965 pa
Tom Considine	Civilian Driver	€32,965 pa

Damien English, T.D. Minister of State 14th July 2014 to 6th May 2016

Appointee	Grade	Salary 2015
Stephen Foley	Personal Assistant	€57,358 pa
Martina Maguire	Personal Secretary	€48,358 pa
Joe Fox	Civilian driver	€34,700 pa
Sean McKiernan	Civilian driver	€34,700 pa

Richard Bruton, T.D. Minister for Education & Skills 7th May 2016 to Present

Appointee	Grade	Salary 2016	Salary 2017
Conor Quinn	Special Adviser	€87,258 pa	€89,965 pa
Patrick Cluskey	Special Adviser	€75,647 pa	€81,004 pa
Sarah O’Neill	Parliamentary As- sistant	See note	See note
Bernadette Lee	Secretarial Assistant	See note	See note
Sean Divilly	Civilian Driver	€32,965 pa	€33,965 pa
John Murray	Civilian Driver	€32,965 pa	€33,965 pa

John Halligan, T.D. Minister of State 6th June 2016 to Present

Appointee	Grade	Salary 2016	Salary 2017
Michelle Clancy	Special Adviser	€65,000 pa	€65,093 pa
Emer O’Neill	Parliamentary As- sistant	See note	See note
Aoife Marks	Secretarial Assistant	See note	See note
Edward Cunningham	Civilian Driver	€34,700 pa	€35,700 pa
Gerard O Brien	Civilian Driver	€34,700 pa	€35,700 pa

Scéim na nOibreacha Éigeandála

312. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an bhfuarthas Iarratas ar Oibreacha Éigeandála atá curtha isteach ag scoil i gContae Dhún na nGall (sonraí curtha ar fáil) chun dul i ngleic leis an bhfadhb taise atá ann i bhfoirgneamh na scoile; cathain a bheidh cinneadh déanta faoin iarratas seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [37010/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is féidir liom a dheimhniú go bhfuil an t-iarratas ar mhaoiniú d'obair éigeandála faighte ón scoil dá bhfuil an Teachta ag tagairt.

Tá cead i bprionabal tugtha don mhaoiniú agus, dá réir, tá sé sin curtha in iúl don scoil. Chun rudaí a bhrú ar aghaidh, tá cead tugtha Sainchomhairleoir a sholáthar chun scóip na n-oibreacha is gá chun dul i ngleic leis an bhfadhb a aithint agus chun costais a sholáthar.

Nuair a bhíonn an t-eolas faighte agus scrúdaithe ag mo Roinn, beifear ábaltá faomhadh an tionscadail a chur ar bhonn foirmiúil.

Special Educational Needs Data

313. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school placements available to children with autism spectrum disorders, ASD, in counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Laois and Offaly; the location of each unit; if places are available at any or all of the units named; if occupational therapy, psychology and speech and language services are available through these ASD classes or locations; his plans in this area of education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37022/17]

314. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide ASD units to all schools in which demand has been identified; if existing ASD classes will be funded to cater for larger numbers in which demand is identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37023/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 313 and 314 together.

The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and 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 also states that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

Decisions about placement should be based on individual needs and take into account a number of factors including parental wishes, availability of evidence-based treatments and well-trained staff and individual factors such as targets for intervention and management of behaviours.

There is therefore not one preferred educational environment for children with ASD, rather there is a model which takes into account the assessed educational needs of individual pupils.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department invests over €300 million annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

- 63% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 11% to attend special schools.

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

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

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

The NCSE continues to establish additional special classes to support children with Special Educational Needs including Autism as required. Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,302 for the 2017/18 school year. 1,042 of these are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes of which 151 are being newly established for this school year.

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

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in a child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

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

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs, including those in the Counties to which the Deputy has referred are available on *www.ncse.ie* in county order, and with new classes identified. Information in relation to the number of available placements in each of these classes is not immediately available to my Department as the placements are still being filled by schools. The NCSE will advise parents of placement options within existing special classes where such placements remain unfilled after the enrolment processes have been concluded.

The provision of therapies such as Speech and Language are under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health and the service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE). Any queries in this regard should be directed to my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Schools Building Projects

315. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will contact the design team for a school (details supplied) regarding the submission of the stage 2b report including the review arising from changes in public work contracts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37029/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Design Team for the major building project at St Joseph's, Kilcock have presented the Stage 2b Report to the Board of Management for review. The Board expect to submit this report to the Department shortly.

Upon receipt and review of this report my Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Schools Building Projects Status

316. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the stage 2b cost check for a new college (details supplied) in County Kildare has been submitted for approval; if tender documents have been submitted for approval; when sanction to seek tenders will be approved; the timeframe for construction to commence on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37030/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

The ETB has confirmed to my Department that the Stage 2B documents are complete except for those in relation to the diversion of overhead power lines traversing the site. The ETB and the Design Team are actively pursuing this issue. When it is resolved, this will enable the submission of the Stage 2B report to my Department. When the report has been received and considered, and assuming there are no issues with it, the project can move to the next stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

317. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the tender documents and stage 2b documentation for a new school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37031/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for

the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b – Detailed Design, which includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Cert and Disability Access Cert and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been obtained.

The Design Team are currently finalising the Stage 2b report. Upon receipt and review of this report my Department will revert to Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

School Accommodation Provision

318. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the additional four classrooms required for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if he will appoint a design team to advance the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37035/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding has been approved for the provision of four additional classrooms at the school to which the Deputy refers.

The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority so it is now a matter for the Board of Management to advance the project.

Schools Building Projects Status

319. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason his officials have not yet communicated with the board of management of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare if the school is to be a new build school project or a refurbishment project; when the position will be clarified; when a design team will be appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37036/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which she refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the Project Brief is currently being finalised which, once completed, will facilitate the project to be progressed into Architectural Planning, which includes the appointment of a Design Team.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

320. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special schools in County Kerry that applied for SNA resources for the 2017-2018 school year; the reason none were sanctioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37043/17]

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

order to be able to attend school and to participate in education

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

The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support, as set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

The level of SNA support allocated to all 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.

The NCSE has advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools, including the three special schools in County Kerry, have been published by the NCSE on their website at http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

In circumstances where a school, or parent, is unhappy with the allocation of SNA support which has been made, or considers the level of support allocated is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the pupils concerned, the school or parent, may appeal that decision via the NCSE appeals process. Details of the NCSE appeals process is available at www.ncse.ie. The closing date for receipt of appeals is the 29th September 2017.

Departmental Staff Data

321. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37070/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can advise the Deputy that as of 31 July 2017, 974 women and 401 men are employed in my Department.

Women	Men
974	401

Departmental Staff Grades

322. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of men and women respectively in his Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37081/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can advise the Deputy that as of 31 July 2017, the following is the breakdown of men and women in my department that hold posts (details supplied):

	Men	Women
Secretary General	1	-
Deputy Secretary		1
Assistant Secretary	5	1
Principal Officer	23	18
Assistant Principal Officer	36	60

School Placement

323. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase primary and post-primary school places in the Cherry Orchard-Park West area of Dublin or in the wider catchment area during the lifetime of the current Dublin City Development Plan 2016 to 2022 (details supplied). [37094/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is included among the prescribed bodies to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development and local area plans or proposed variations to development plans for comment and observations. This enables local authorities to reserve future school sites in areas designated for proposed housing development. My Department contributed to the Draft Dublin City Development Plan 2016-2022 in 2015.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from 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 is currently carrying out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Following the completion of the 2017 demographic exercises, additional schools may open. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

Special Educational Needs Staff

324. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the decision to revoke a special needs assistant for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37150/17]

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

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory

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

The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additional support is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

The NCSE advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2017/18 school year on 6th July 2017. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf.

The level of SNA support allocated to all 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 has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

In circumstances where a school, or parent, is unhappy with the allocation of SNA support which has been made, or considers the level of support allocated is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the pupils concerned, the school or parent, may appeal that decision via the NCSE appeals process. Details of the NCSE appeals process is available at www.ncse.ie; the closing date for receipt of appeals is the 29th September 2017.

As the question refers to SNA support for an individual child, I have arranged for the NCSE to provide a direct reply to the Deputy.

Teachers' Remuneration

325. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when teachers can expect an increase in pay following the strike by a union (details supplied); when his Department will unfreeze the increments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37169/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I welcome the decision taken last June by the ASTI to suspend all industrial action relating to the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) and Junior Cycle reform.

As a result of the suspension, a number of direct financial benefits now apply to teachers who were not previously covered by the LRA, including ASTI members.

The pay measures which took effect from 10 June (the date of the suspension of industrial action) include:

- Pay improvements for post-February 2012 entrant teachers through the payment of the first phase of new salary scales (Second phase due January 2018);

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- Lifting of the freeze on the payment of increments;
- Pay increase through the addition of the first S&S moiety (€796) to the teacher pay scale (Second moiety due September 2017);
- Pay increase of €1,000 through the bringing forward of the 1 September pay increase;
- Restoration of the alleviation of the FEMPI Act pay reductions for higher earners;
- Payment of the first phase of the reversal of the FEMPI Act pay reductions for higher earners (Second phase due January 2018).

Further to the above, all teachers are now covered by the terms of the Ward Circular and a revised sequence for filling posts/hours in schools which enable fixed-term and part-time teachers to gain permanent, full-time jobs more quickly and easier than before.

Other benefits made available to teachers not previously covered by the LRA include:

- Access to promotion posts announced in Budget 2017 based on arrangements to be set out in a new Department Circular;
- S&S opt-out option for teachers with a minimum of 15 years' service;
- S&S opt-in option for teachers who had previously opted out;
- An increase in the quantum of Croke Park hours which can be worked on other than whole-school basis;
- A review of the usage of the Croke Park hours;
- Access to redeployment;
- Provision of professional time associated with the implementation of the Junior Cycle.

All of the pay restoration measures due from 10 June to teachers who were not previously covered by the LRA (including ASTI members) have been implemented on my Department's Payroll. The second S&S moiety which is due to be paid to teachers with effect from 1 September 2017 will be paid in September 2017.

The continuing restoration of the financial and other benefits of the LRA are contingent on the continuing application of the suspension of all industrial action. In the event that the suspension of industrial action by members of the ASTI is not sustained, the restoration measures above would stand to be reversed.

Schools Building Projects Status

326. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding an application for a new school building by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37174/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021).

Arrangements are being made to progress the project into architectural planning which will facilitate the appointment of a Design Team.

School Textbooks

327. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the high cost of school books; the evaluation by his Department of an initiative by a company (details supplied) to supply books at a significantly lower cost than others; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37180/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is a matter for the Board of Management of each individual school to decide on its own policy in relation to the use of textbooks in the school. Individual schools should adopt a cost-conscious approach to the selection of books in their classes.

In relation to textbook costs an agreement was reached with the Irish Educational Publisher's Association which resulted in the agreement of a Code of Practice. The Code commits the publishers to limit the publication of new editions and to maintaining editions of books in print unchanged for at least six years. The publishers have also given assurances that they will sell textbooks to schools at discounts so that schools can purchase textbooks in bulk to stock book rental schemes.

School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents. Circa 95% of primary schools and 65% of post-primary schools operate a book rental scheme.

My Department supports the operation of book rental schemes through the funding provided under its school books grant scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €16 million annually to all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. In addition €15.7 million seed capital was provided over three years to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools.

One of the actions as part of the Action Plan for Education is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by increasing the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce/eliminate school book costs for parents as resources permit.

My Department has published a circular to school authorities and ETBs regarding measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the costs which include the provision of a book rental scheme. The circular can be accessed on my Department's website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032_2017.pdf.

Schools Building Projects Data

328. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of all capital expenditure such as extensions, new builds and additional accommodation for all primary schools in County Offaly since January 2011, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37210/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The capital funding expended on new schools, school extensions, additional accommodation, emergency works and the summer works scheme for primary schools in Offaly in the period 2011 - August 2017 follows.

Details of all school capital works that have been funded by my Department may be viewed on my Department's website www.education.ie and this is updated regularly.

	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	
SCHOOL NAME	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	
ARDEN BOYS NS	9,070.50	12,378.50	8,386.00	106,150.50	58,412.93	8,090.00	2,091.00	
BALLYKILMURRY NS	10,458.00	9,782.48	104,018.66	10,661.50	10,402.50	10,439.50	0	
BROUGHAL NS	6,018.00	0	5,962.50	5,888.50	5,833.00	5,851.50	206.36	
CARRAIG NS BIRR	7,294.50	0	7,162.69	6,758.00	17,388.00	7,807.59	0	
CHARLEVILLE NS	57,907.44	0	7,276.00	7,276.00	7,257.50	7,331.50	0	
CLARA CONVENT NS	149,055.75	349.2	10,381.20	9,089.00	9,033.50	168,883.57	18,500.00	
CLONAGHADOO NS	7,350.00	0	97,542.50	53,662.50	7,627.50	7,627.50	3,171.67	
CLONBULLOGUE NATIONAL SCHOOL	30,313.54	0	7,646.00	26,438.05	7,516.50	7,604.81	0	
CLONEYHURKE NS	18,258.50	0	6,221.50	6,166.00	6,092.00	6,036.50	0	
COOLANARNEY NS	9,716.50	0	6,739.50	6,702.50	6,721.00	214,587.46	54,739.74	
COOLDERRY CENTRAL NS	9,236.48	35,612.50	7,294.50	7,165.00	156,224.38	22,025.00	0	
CROGHAN NS	7,331.50	4,722.04	7,257.50	7,350.00	7,313.00	7,202.00	0	
CROINCHOILL NS	768,477.61	730,268.17	19,054.86	60,342.53	84,455.43	20,312.11	9,464.74	
DAINGEAN NS	14,978.00	18,499.95	86,685.49	65,075.16	93,083.38	13,925.40	0	
GAELSCOIL EISICIR RIADA	9,459.00	0	9,440.50	9,403.50	116,092.54	9,329.50	47,755.59	
GAELSCOIL BHIORRA	0	0	0	0	95,734.99	52,980.11	0	
GEASHILL 1 NS	7,794.00	0	8,354.00	8,127.00	398,824.40	298,970.05	0	
GORTNAMONA NS	7,128.00	387.45	7,035.50	6,980.00	6,980.00	6,832.00	18,500.00	
GS EADAN DOIRE	33,337.95	16,300.46	133,430.27	1,378,292.11	23,212.17	12,228.50	13,500.00	
HIGH ST MIXED NS	11,392.00	1,773.76	6,813.50	6,913.03	7,227.53	119,938.56	0	
KILCORMAC CONVENT NS	4,300.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	
KILLEEN NS	7,220.50	0	30,896.37	17,356.73	7,424.00	110,602.00	0	
KINNITTY NS	12,318.95	2,004.80	152,513.26	38,166.00	22,274.00	7,627.50	0	
MARIAN NS OFFALY SCHOOL OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	7,631.68	7,148.50	29,499.25	15,287.94	18,147.72	16,448.75	16,792.12	
MERCY PRIMARY SCHOOL	11,364.50	0	9,551.50	9,385.00	78,828.13	8,811.50	15,996.65	
MONASTERORIS NS	7,054.00	0	6,961.50	6,850.50	6,739.50	6,684.00	107.59	

Questions - Written Answers

MOUNT-BOLUS NATIONAL SCHOOL	6,314.00	0	6,166.00	6,203.00	6,166.00	6,184.50	0	
NAOMH MHUIRE NS	7,387.00	362,906.20	15,461.00	42,254.54	7,331.50	82,885.00	68,558.82	
POLLAGH NS	57,926.28	0	7,257.50	7,387.00	7,405.50	89,279.53	0	
PORTARLINGTON NS	54,768.48	2,633,558.02	19,390.83	60,191.50	19,742.45	34,541.50	1,693.48	
ROSCOMROE NS	64,129.97	39,865.49	6,110.50	5,888.50	5,925.50	5,907.00	0	
S N BHRIDE	7,146.50	0	7,239.00	7,128.00	7,091.00	7,128.00	0	
S N CHAR-TAIGH NAOFA	28,164.00	6,500.00	18,498.85	14,995.50	88,225.09	16,699.00	6,500.00	
S N LOM-CHLUANA	15,500.70	0	6,647.00	7,678.50	24,328.50	13,221.00	0	
S N MUIRE BAINRION	14,999.00	0	11,147.68	59,302.41	184,208.99	13,215.00	157,619.90	
S N NAOMH BROGAIN	8,829.50	0	7,202.00	7,183.50	9,877.04	7,165.00	0	
S N NAOMH PHILOM-ENA	39,796.63	0	8,460.00	21,001.00	33,209.00	16,663.22	0	
S N OS-MANN	143,032.18	0	177,942.22	7,276.00	7,165.00	7,109.50	0	
S N PEADAR AGUS POL	28,840.00	0	12,233.30	29,690.97	26,412.86	5,962.50	0	
S N SHEO-SAIMH NAOFA	1,703,791.34	174,067.95	117,290.33	10,226.50	11,436.95	8,904.00	2,053.84	
SCOIL BHRIDE	48,812.99	0	9,070.50	8,996.50	46,338.95	8,959.50	0	
SCOIL BHRIDE	79,698.49	93,798.24	351,868.01	5,592,377.70	1,555,793.21	34,420.87	175,148.32	
SCOIL CRONAIN NAOFA	1,078,420.95	24,837.73	62,677.55	56,230.79	10,217.50	11,281.45	2,370.72	
SCOIL MHUIRE	25,813.45	41,548.46	86,185.59	55,533.68	96,251.26	2,214,958.73	2,092,908.12	
SCOIL MHUIRE AGUS CHORMAIC	77,004.50	574.98	7,257.50	10,674.76	131,092.80	131,182.69	106,757.47	
SCOIL NAOMH EOIN	52,427.79	0	7,407.00	7,387.00	70,866.00	16,516.50	7,471.00	
SCOIL NAOMH PADRAIG	7,683.00	46,996.50	7,775.50	7,683.00	7,868.00	8,201.00	0	
SHINCHILL NS	79,551.50	37,500.00	9,958.50	163,576.02	80,111.66	10,402.50	18,500.00	
SHINRONE MXD NS	13,688.20	0	10,988.00	8,090.00	9,170.61	8,127.00	0	
SN CAOIMHIN NAOFA	7,350.00	0	7,405.50	8,850.35	7,239.00	7,128.00	0	
SN CHIARA-IN NAOFA	12,870.51	0	6,887.50	43,708.70	22,600.23	6,906.00	0	
SN MHUIRE	7,461.00	4,519.00	673,316.80	36,367.00	7,738.50	9,442.20	0	
SN MHUIRE BAIN-RIOGHAN	8,926.50	0	6,702.50	6,647.00	6,554.50	58,316.98	0	

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SN MHUIRE NAOFA	11,490.00	0	10,615.78	9,181.50	8,978.00	8,719.00	14,601.93	
SN NAOMH CHOLUM-CHILLE	13,001.90	2,694.72	9,366.50	9,963.50	393,779.34	10,645.75	0	
SN PHAD-RAIG	14,914.65	0	7,812.50	7,812.50	7,683.00	7,664.50	0	
ST BRENDANS MONASTERY	164,365.19	0	9,773.50	16,033.00	64,734.87	10,549.58	20,671.70	
ST CALLINANS NS	6,462.00	6,666.94	6,499.00	6,680.50	7,836.23	6,684.00	0	
ST CIARANS MIXED NS	7,535.00	0	7,442.50	23,690.00	121,692.20	32,724.06	6,500.00	
ST COLMANS NS	122,132.02	211,717.97	120,376.68	119,593.00	11,216.50	12,365.59	0	
ST COLMANS NS	9,139.26	474.82	7,276.00	7,405.50	42,940.50	7,516.50	0	
ST CORMACS NS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
ST CRO-NANS NS LUSMAGH	12,043.98	0	6,758.00	6,610.00	6,591.50	6,739.50	0	
ST CYNOCS NATIONAL SCHOOL	19,761.72	0	14,792.50	19,626.25	14,792.50	14,644.50	0	
ST FRANCIS BNS	11,701.00	38,966.17	9,440.50	30,012.30	30,294.35	766,425.00	252,720.75	
ST JOSEPHS NS	17,916.24	973.31	18,689.50	47,278.22	20,317.50	437,346.09	123,543.90	
ST KIERANS NS	8,860.81	0	6,684.00	6,702.50	6,480.50	6,591.50	0	
ST MARYS BOYS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
ST MARYS NS	19,274.50	0	61,851.80	190,376.25	29,784.64	13,344.00	0	
ST MARYS NS	24,770.88	0	6,850.50	6,887.50	14,591.00	7,146.50	0	
ST PATRICKS BNS	34,940.79	0	53,835.50	24,662.65	58,267.59	66,064.83	39,979.09	
ST. JOSEPHS NS	7,126.00	0	6,499.00	41,723.18	6,702.50	6,795.00	25,038.30	
ST. RY-ANAGH'S NS	21,214.50	792.12	10,754.00	10,569.00	10,754.00	10,587.50	0	
TULLAMORE EDUCATE TOGETHER NS	23,503.22	4,257.40	8,996.50	68,584.33	2,632,850.67	474,154.54	73,363.45	
Total	5,454,955.02	4,572,443.83	2,828,985.47	8,821,408.15	7,239,500.59	5,905,593.02	3,396,826.25	38,219,712.33

Schools Establishment

329. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has plans or explored the possibility of a secondary school in the Togher area of Cork. [37211/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. Togher falls into the Glasheen_Cork City school planning area which is currently served by nine post-primary schools.

My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from 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 is currently carrying out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Following the completion of the 2017 demographic exercises, additional schools may open. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

Departmental Expenditure

330. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37223/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the attached table. This table lists the total amount paid in fees and negative interest in respect of all accounts for each of the past five years and to the end of June 2017.

My Department operates a number of commercial bank accounts all of which are held in the Bank of Ireland and one investment account which is held in the Central Bank in respect of the National Training Fund. Bank of Ireland introduced transactional fee charges effective from January 2017 and negative interest charges effective from March 2017 on all bank accounts. Prior to this date, fees were applied only to the commercial bank account of the National Training Fund and negative interest applied to the investment account in the Central Bank.

My Department operates three credit card and has a very strict policy in relation to their use. Their use is restricted to the Ministerial Offices and to the Department's IT Division. Fees include Government Stamp Duty, Interest and the Bank's own Annual Fee.

There are no debit cards in operation in my Department.

Year	Transaction Fees Paid on Department Accounts	Negative Interest Paid on Department Accounts	Fees Paid on Department Credit Cards
2012	6,232.78	-	123.18
2013	7,667.64	-	235.29
2014	6,833.88	-	220.82
2015	6,000.00	223,000.00	183.00
2016	12,753.85	232,531.28	183.00
YTD June 2017	77,061.18	7,670.96	180.16
Total Paid	116,549.33	463,202.24	1,125.45

Digital Strategy for Schools

331. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the information and communications technology grant for schools covers the procurement of educational social media platforms. [37232/17]

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

The purpose of this funding is to ensure that schools can support the embedding of digital technologies in teaching and learning. In considering how to allocate this funding, schools are advised to consider their Digital Learning Plan (also known as eLearning Plan), to ensure that any investment made in digital technologies aligns with that. Schools should consider why they might make a particular acquisition, and in particular how such an acquisition can support teaching and learning in their school. Having considered those questions, schools have flexibility regarding what to invest in to progress their digital learning objectives.

Details of the Grant Scheme for ICT Infrastructure, including eligibility criteria, the methodology applied to calculating the payments and examples of what the funding may cover, can be found on the Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0001_2017.pdf.

School Transport Applications

332. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a transport grant for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37308/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of the Department's Primary School Transport Scheme children are generally eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school.

Children who are eligible for school transport but for whom no transport service is available may, following an application for transport within prescribed time limits, receive a Remote Area Grant towards the cost of private transport arrangements.

The family in question were late in submitting their application for school transport for the 2016/17 school year and therefore can only claim the grant from the beginning of the 2017/18 school year.

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

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

333. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding available for persons wishing to complete a masters in primary education. [37320/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): There are a number of possible support options available to persons wishing to complete a masters in primary education.

The Deputy will be aware of the Action Plan for Education commitment to increase financial supports for postgraduate students with a particular focus on those from low income households.

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

The Student Grant Scheme is now open for applications for the 2017/18 academic year.

Postgraduate students who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible for the Postgraduate Special Rate of Maintenance grant, the income threshold for this grant is €23,000, also postgraduate students are eligible to have their post graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit of €6,270.

Alternatively a postgraduate student may qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the cost of his/her fees. The income threshold for this payment is €31,500 for the 2017/2018 academic year.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Some higher education institutions operate their own benevolent schemes. Prospective students should contact the access office in the college attended, for advice on the specific supports that might be available.

School Funding

334. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the way in which post-primary schools in County Leitrim are funded; the top-up, if any, that applies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37339/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The funding arrangements made by my Department for post-primary schools, including schools in Co Leitrim, reflect the sectoral division of our second-level system. At the core of all arrangements is reliance upon capitation as the principal determinant of funding.

My Department provides funding to voluntary secondary schools by way of *per capita*

grants. Funding is provided to Community and Comprehensive schools on a budget basis that is based mainly on student numbers, but also takes into account additional factors which vary from school to school such as condition of buildings, size of school etc.

With regard to the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector, financial allocations are made to ETBs as part of a block grant. ETBs are given a high level of autonomy in the management and appropriation of this grant and each ETB is allowed to distribute its allocations in line with its priorities and perceptions of need.

The salaries of Teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) employed in Voluntary Secondary, Community and Comprehensive schools are paid through payrolls that are centrally operated by my Department. In the case of the ETB Sector my Department provides grants to each ETB to pay its teachers and SNAs.

Other financial supports are given to post-primary schools such as grants towards the cost of employing ancillary staff, ICT Infrastructure, Programme Grants, Capital projects, etc.

School Funding

335. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the annual budget for a post-primary school (details supplied) in County Leitrim, in particular, special needs funding and its specific purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37340/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy is an ETB school.

ETB schools are not funded directly by my Department but are funded via budget allocations provided to each ETB. ETBs are responsible for allocating funding to each of the schools under their remit.

Each Education and Training Board (ETB), including the ETB of the school concerned, has a responsibility to ensure that maximum value is obtained from the funding provided to them. ETBs are afforded considerable flexibility in the use of resources to meet the needs of individual schemes. Current funding payments are made to ETBs as part of a block grant that also covers ETB overheads and other activities apart from the second-level programme.

Separate to the block grant funding and with regards to special needs funding there are two relevant grants; the Special Class Grant and an Assistive Technology Grant.

With regard to the Special Class Grant, enhanced capitation payments are made for all students attending special classes in mainstream schools and is issued from the ETB Non Pay subhead.

Students enrolled in special classes must have a formal assessment of disability. Special class sizes are based on the pupil-teacher ratios as recommended in the SERC Report 1993 ranging from 11:1 to 6:1. The enhanced capitation grant for Special Classes is provided to the ETB for the approved students and the ETB in-turn disburse the grant to the schools. The approved numbers apply on a school by school basis and are not transferable to other schools within the ETB.

With regards to the Assistive Technology grant, the purpose of the Assistive Technology scheme is to provide grant-aid to schools to allow them to purchase the type of specialist equip-

ment which has been recommended by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) as being essential for pupils who have been diagnosed as:

- (i) having a serious physical disability
- (ii) and/or sensory or communicative disability to the extent that their ability to communicate through the medium of speech or writing is materially curtailed
- (iii) where it is clear that existing equipment in the school is insufficient to meet the child's needs without unduly depriving other children of access to the equipment.
- (iv) where without such equipment it will not be possible for such children to access the school curriculum.

Where a school is under a particular ETB, payment is made directly to the ETB in question who will then forward the payment to the relevant school.

If the Deputy requires further information the ETB may be contacted directly for further details.

State Examinations

336. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason students in a post-primary school (details supplied) in County Leitrim are not provided the option of the leaving certificate applied programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37341/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is one of a number of options made available by my Department for Senior Cycle students which schools can choose from, based on the education needs and interests of their student.

It is the responsibility and choice of each individual school to decide to put in place the LCA programme, based on the educational needs and interests of their students. It is also for schools to decide on the admittance of a student to the programme, in their school. Schools are encouraged to provide maximum access to these options and to have clear procedures in place regarding how the available places are allocated to students.

Schools that choose to organise the LCA programme are entitled to an additional fixed allocation of 0.5 of a teaching post, over the standard allocation. There is no minimum number of LCA pupils required for schools to secure the additional teaching allocation from my Department.

My Department is committed to supporting this programme, which is appropriate for members of the student cohort whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes (Leaving Cert Established and Leaving Cert Vocational Programme). That is why I have asked the NCCA to consider the LCA, as part of its review of Senior Cycle which commenced in 2017. This review will help to ensure curriculum development continues to respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

School Curriculum

337. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a comparative expenditure analysis of the ETB's proposal for the provision of an equivalent to the leaving certificate applied programme in a town (details supplied) in County Leitrim versus the cost of the introduction of the LCA programme in the post-primary school in the same town has been carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37342/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): A proposal has not as yet been received by my Department. It would be expected that any such proposal would include an identification of local need and a consideration of options for addressing it.

Question No. 338 answered with Question No. 308.

Tionscadail Tógála Scoileanna

339. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén fáth nach bhfuil cead á thabhairt do scoil (sonraí tugtha) naíonra a thógáil ar thalamh na scoile cé gurb amhlaidh gur tugadh cead don scoil in 2014 cead pleanála a lorg do naíonra ar thalamh na scoile agus go bhfuarthas an cead sin in 2016, ag féachaint go háirithe don leas a dhéantar d'iompar teanga gasúr i nGaelscoileanna nuair a bhíonn naíonra ceangailte leis an nGaelscoil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [37504/17]

340. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cad é an líon Gaelscoileanna a raibh cead pleanála faighte acu do naíonraí ach a bhfuil an cead sin coinnithe siar anois orthu de bharr an athbhreithnithe atá á dhéanamh ag an Aire ar an mbeartas maidir le cead a thabhairt do Ghaelscoileanna naíonraí a thógáil ar a gcuid tailte; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [37505/17]

341. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a chríochnófar an t-athbhreithniú ar an mbeartas maidir le cead a thabhairt do Ghaelscoileanna naíonraí a thógáil ar thailte a gcuid scoileanna; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [37506/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tá sé i gceist agam Ceisteanna Parlaiminte 339 go 341 a thógáil le chéile.

Scríobh mo Roinn chuig Príomhoide na scoile dá raibh tagairt déanta ag an Teachta i mí Iúil 2016 ina n-áiríodh go mbreathnaíonn an Roinn go dearfach de ghnáth ar iarratais ar chóiríocht a chur ar fáil do Naíonraí, ach nuair a cuireadh an t-iarratas áirithe seo isteach, bhí saincheisteanna ann a bhí á meas sa chomhthéacs i gcoitinne maidir le soláthar naíonraí ar réadmhaoín scoileanna. San áireamh sna saincheisteanna seo bhí comhaontuithe réadmhaoine agus dlíthiúla, rialachas, árachas agus cúrsaí dliteanais. Bhí comhairle dlí á meas.

Cuireadh in iúl don Phríomhoide go raibh na saincheisteanna seo á meas mar chuid den athbhreithniú i gcoitinne laistigh den Roinn maidir leis na riachtanais atá le bheith bunaithe maidir le húsáid réadmhaoín na scoile do sheirbhísí naíonraí agus iarscoile agus maidir le hullmhúchán na dtreoirlínte a bhaineann leis seo.

Is féidir liom a dheimhniú go bhfuil na treoirlínte maidir le húsáid foirgneamh scoile curtha i gcrích agus go bhfuil siad le foilsiú go luath. Beidh na treoirlínte seo i bhfeidhm i ngach scoil agus ní bhaineann siad le gaelscoileanna amháin. A luaithe agus a fhoilseofar na treoirlínte seo, beidh mo Roinn i dteagmháil le húdaráis na scoile chuí i dtaca leis an scoil a ndearna an Teachta tagairt di.

Níl taifid láraithe de na gaelscoileanna a fuair cead pleanála do naíonraí ag an Roinn. Ach, más mian leis an Teachta eolas a lorg maidir le scoil ar leith, tabharfaidh oifigigh ó mo Roinn cuidiú duit maidir le ceist ar leith.

Schools Building Projects Status

342. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding plans to build a new school for a school (details supplied) which was promised in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37532/17]

391. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the rebuild of a school (details supplied); the stage it is at; the timeframe of construction; when groundworks will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38073/17]

395. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the stage the redevelopment and new buildings for a school (details supplied) is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38077/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 342, 391 and 395 together.

The major school building project to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2(b). All statutory approvals have been secured.

However, following the necessary appointment of a replacement Mechanical & Electrical Engineer the Design Team in association with the newly appointed Engineer are working on a revised MandE report which will be submitted to the Department when it is completed.

Upon receipt and review of the report my Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

School Funding

343. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review an application for extra funding for a national school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37539/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department considered the application for additional capital funding from the school to which she refers to have merit and, consequently, the additional funding was approved in full. The school authority was informed of my Department's decision.

School Transport Eligibility

344. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for a reversal in decision to grant a concessionary ticket for school transport to a person (details supplied) and if he will review this decision. [37574/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms the Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

Bus Éireann has advised that the family in question are not eligible for school transport as they do not meet the distance criterion.

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

In this case, the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available.

The child in question was not allocated a seat during the subsequent selection process and the family have been refunded their payment.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Eligibility

345. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37602/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms the Primary School Transport Scheme Children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

Bus Éireann has advised that the family in question are not eligible for school transport as they reside less than 3.2 kilometres from their school of attendance.

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

In this case, the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available. However, the family in question were allocated seats during the subsequent selection process and are availing of transport.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Completion Programme

346. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the most recent figure for school completion rates in DEIS schools. [37692/17]

347. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the most recent national average figure for school completion rates. [37693/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 346 and 347 together.

National school completion rates are published by my Department in the reports titled Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools. These reports can be found on my Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/Other-Statistical-Reports.html>.

The most recently published data, for the cohort who entered post-primary education in 2009 and sat the leaving certificate in either 2014 or 2015, shows a national retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 90.2%. The retention rate in DEIS schools was 82.7%.

Institutes of Technology Staff

348. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current student to staff ratio in institutes of technology. [37695/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The higher education institutional profiles for the 2013/2014 academic year give an academic staff : student ratio of 1:16 for the Institute of Technology sector. The Higher Education Authority is currently finalising the institutional profiles for the 2014/15 academic year and this will include an updated academic staff : student ratio for the sector.

School Transport Applications Data

349. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of concessionary applications for school transport for the 2017-2018 school year by county; the number of which are new applications, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37731/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and

are attending their nearest school.

Children who are 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.

I have requested Bus Éireann to provide the Deputy with the requested information when it is finalised for the 2017/18 school year.

Consultancy Contracts Data

350. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of money which was spent in his Department on external consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37732/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Details of external consultancy payments made by my Department for the years 2011 to 2016 inclusive are available on the Department's website <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Financial-Reports/Expenditure-on-Consultancy/>.

Information in relation to consultancy expenditure is compiled annually in respect of the previous year. Details in respect of consultants engaged in 2017 will be compiled and published early in 2018.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

351. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the mental health and counselling positions in secondary education and the annual cost of same; the way in which these are provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37733/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department promotes a comprehensive and whole of school approach to the promotion of well-being and positive mental health. This approach considers the entire school community, as well as focussing on groups and individual young people with identified need. This approach spans the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support, pastoral care, guidance counselling and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves accessing other supports such as educational psychology services and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Additionally, schools engage in a wide range of sport and cultural activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth. The whole staff shares responsibility for general student well-being.

The Well-being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) provides a framework for schools to present in an integrated way their existing good practice. The Guidelines promote social and emotional learning, and mental health and direct them to new practices, as appropriate.

More recently, my Department's Action Plan for Education 2017 promotes well-being as one of its key goals. Other actions, in addition to those outlined above, relating to well-being

and mental health in the primary school sector include:

Developing an integrated programme of support for all schools to implement the Well-being Guidelines and an implementation plan for roll-out of this programme to all post-primary schools.

Increasing the capacity of NEPS: an enhanced educational psychological service to schools, through the appointment of an additional 10 educational psychologists. The focus of this additional support will be on extending the delivery of training to teachers in DEIS schools.

From September 2017 all students entering first year will study a new area of learning at Junior Cycle called Well-being. There is a suite of supports provided to post-primary schools to enable them to implement the Well-being Programme.

Measures announced by my Department as part of Budget 2016 and 2017 mean that 400 guidance posts, or two thirds of the guidance allocation that was withdrawn in Budget 2012, will be restored to schools from September 2017. All of these 400 posts are allocated separately and transparently on the staffing schedule of posts for schools. The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) will revert to 19:1 with effect from September 2017 with the guidance allocation shown separately on the staffing schedules and will represent 0.4 of the PTR for each school. There is now an obligation on schools to ensure that the hours are used for guidance activities. Principals may decide to allocate more hours to guidance activities than the amount allocated on the schedule; they cannot decide to allocate fewer.

While most of the 400 posts restored over the past two years are likely to be allocated to guidance counsellors, schools may decide, in the context of their guidance plans, to allocate some resources to others who may also play a role in delivering guidance in the schools. However, my Department has made it clear that schools' guidance plans should include specified time allocation for guidance counsellors to be available for one-to-one guidance counselling and time allocation for the role in supporting the organisation and work of the Student Support Team.

School Meals Programme

352. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to put in place a national catering standard for secondary schools to provide healthy food in the school cafeterias. [37734/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The main programme for food provision in primary and post primary schools is the School Meals Scheme. The operation of that scheme is an issue for the Minister for Social Protection.

My Department's main responsibility in this area is to equip students with the key skills and knowledge to enable them to make informed and healthier choices in a range of areas, including nutrition. This is addressed in schools through subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Home Economics as well as in PE.

Schools are strongly encouraged to have a formal healthy eating policy that has been developed in consultation with students and parents.

Guidelines are available to schools on developing a healthy eating policy in Post-Primary Schools, which have been developed by the Department of Health and HSE. The healthy eating policy should outline how the school supports healthy eating practices through the promotion

of healthy lunches and healthy snacks and other means.

My Department issued a circular to all post primary schools in September 2015 on the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Post Primary Schools (Circular number 0051/2015) and to all primary schools in February 2016 on the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Primary Schools (Circular number 0013/2016). These circulars aim to support and strengthen schools' efforts in developing in young people the skills and attitudes needed to make informed decisions about their health.

School Transport Appeals

353. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review a case (details supplied); if both reports by the school transport section and Bus Éireann will be supplied in order that an appeal can be heard at the next meeting of the board of appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37735/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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 School Transport Appeals Board, which is independent of my Department, will liaise directly with the families regarding the date that the appeals in question will be considered.

Traveller Education

354. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that participation rates for members of the Traveller community are not available for the apprenticeship system; and if he will consider gathering such data to ensure participation rates are monitored and improved. [37790/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I understand from SOLAS that they have no plans to ask employers to capture and submit information around whether the apprentices they employ are members of the travelling community.

As set out in the Action Plan to Extend Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020, a review will be undertaken of the pathways to participation in apprenticeship for a range of diverse groups, including members of the travelling community, and in light of the broadening of the apprenticeship system into new areas. The review will be completed in 2018.

Overall, the Further Education and Training (FET) sector made provision for over 330,000 beneficiaries in 2016. The FET Strategy has a strong focus on active inclusion and this is the subject of one of the five strategy goals.

In the context of the annual FET service planning process that takes place between SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), ETBs are required to consider the needs of a broad range of learners and disadvantaged groups, including members of the travelling community.

This is reinforced through the identification of Travellers as a priority target group within various programmes. For example, this is set out in the operational guidelines for the Back to Education Initiative and the Adult Literacy Service.

Apprenticeship Data

355. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices registered in each apprenticeship programme, in tabular form. [37791/17]

356. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new apprenticeship programmes that have been and will be introduced in 2017. [37792/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 355 and 356 together.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of apprentices registered in 2017 on all phases of their apprenticeship is set out in the attached table.

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.

To date nine new apprenticeship programmes have been developed in Insurance Practice, Industrial Electrical Engineering, Polymer Processing Technology, Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Engineer, Accounting Technician, Commis Chef and two programmes in International Financial Services (Associate & Specialist).

Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted for validation to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in September and, subject to successful validation, it is expected that a further six new schemes will get underway later this year in various sectors including ICT, craft butchery and equipment manufacturing.

Apprentice Population 2017 by Sector and Trade	
Construction Total	2706
Brick and Stonelaying	112
Cabinet Making	2
Carpentry and Joinery	1030
Floor and Wall Tiling	0
Painting and Decorating	73
Plastering	60
Plumbing	1259
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	32
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	138
Wood Machinist	0
Electrical Total	4916
Aircraft Mechanics	133
Electrical	4099
Electrical Instrumentation	280
Electronic Security Systems	106

Instrumentation	36
Refrigeration	262
Engineering Total	1717
Farrery	17
Industrial Insulation	57
M.A.M.F.	582
Metal Fabrication	653
*Pipefitting	75
Sheet Metalworking	115
Toolmaking	238
Motor Total	2325
Agricultural Mechanics	152
Construction Plant Fitting	238
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	487
Motor Mechanics	1288
Vehicle Body Repairs	160
Printing & Paper Total	18
Print Media	18
Printing	0
Bookbinding	0
Grand Total	11682

***Please note: end of 2016 Pipefitting is included in the Engineering Family of Trade**

Consortia Led Apprenticeships Total 2016/2017 @ 31 August 2017

	Grand Total
Electrical	27
Industrial Electrical Eng	27
Engineering	56
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	30
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	9
Polymer Processing Tech	17
Financial Services	105
Accounting Technician	9
Insurance Practice	96
Total (Consortia-Led)	188
Grand Total (All)	11,870

Psychological Assessments

357. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a psychological assessment and a keyboard for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37803/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy

that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, 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.

Home Tuition Scheme

358. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 379 of 26 July 2017, the reason his Department is not in a position to enter into direct contracts of employment with home tutors so as to ensure greater protection and security for these persons and those using their services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37827/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide funding towards the provision of a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of specific reasons, are unable to attend school.

The preferred approach is that children are educated in school settings where children may have access to fully qualified teachers, individualised education programmes, special needs assistants, school curriculum with the option, where possible and appropriate, of full or partial integration and interaction with other students.

The Home Tuition Grant is provided as an interim measure only for children who cannot access a placement in a recognised school and should not be regarded as an alternative to a school placement. When the child in question can access a school placement the Home Tuition Grant will be discontinued.

My Department does not recruit or employ teachers, it is the Board of Management of schools or Education and Training Board, as appropriate, which is responsible for employment of teachers in schools.

Similarly, my Department does not recruit or employ individuals to provide home tuition. Parents/Guardians select and engage tutors for the provision of Home Tuition in a private arrangement which is then funded through the scheme.

It is a condition of funding for the various home tuition schemes, that all tutors engaged by

Parents/Guardians must be registered with the Teaching Council and have been vetted by the Teaching Council via the Teaching Council's online vetting process. Tutors must also provide a completed child protection related Statutory Declaration and Form of Undertaking.

Parents/guardians are also advised that in addition to vetting, parents may request references and/or employment history in order to satisfy themselves regarding the suitability of the person to carry out tuition with their child.

Third Level Admissions Reform

359. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some colleges are operating a system of a fixed number of places for mature students, HEAR and DARE applicants collectively (details supplied); his plans to change the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37857/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The DARE scheme is a third-level admissions scheme for students with a disability offering places on reduced points basis to school leavers with disabilities who are under 23. HEAR is a college and university admissions scheme offering places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The DARE HEAR schemes have been operated by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and regulated by the higher education institutions themselves and not by my Department. The operational management of DARE HEAR has transferred from the Shared Services Unit in the IUA to the CAO.

Question No. 360 answered with Question No. 308.

School Transport Administration

361. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on status of the review of the criteria and guidelines of the school transport appeals board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37888/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year 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 has been completed and is available on the Department's website.

School Transport Availability

362. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he

plans to implement to deal with difficulties which have arisen for many families in the school transport scheme, with particular reference to the availability of concessionary tickets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37889/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are 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.

Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis; no additional State cost will be incurred.

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

DEIS Data

363. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools that are in the DEIS programme by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37890/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link:

https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis_school_list.xls

School Staff

364. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the school community at a school (details supplied) with regard to the loss of a teaching post which will negatively impact on the school; if he will provide assistance to this school regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37891/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor

for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its April 2017 meeting under the small school criterion. The appeal was provisionally approved by the Appeals Board pending confirmation of the actual enrolments in September 2017. The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Schools Refurbishment

365. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the refurbishment plans scheduled for a school (details supplied) in County Mayo. [37898/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department approved a significant devolved grant in 2012 in respect of the school referred to for a permanent extension to replace some temporary buildings identified as being most in need of replacement. Approval has also been granted for a set down and bus drop off area, the relocation of existing ball courts and works to the front entrance, along with other abnormal works. This project was devolved to the Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim ETB for delivery.

Following receipt of tenders, a number of issues were identified with the tendering process and it was necessary to re-tender the project in line with Department guidelines. Once the re-tendering process has been completed successfully it is expected that this project should proceed to construction stage.

School Management

366. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the members of the board of management in primary schools receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37904/17]

367. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the members of the board of management in secondary schools receive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37905/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 and 367 together.

Section 14 of the Education Act 1998 places a duty on the patron of a recognised school, for the purposes of ensuring that such a school is managed in a spirit of partnership, to appoint, where practicable, a board of management. The composition of a board of management is based on centrally agreed arrangements between the relevant stakeholders.

Persons elected/nominated to serve on boards of management of recognised primary and post primary schools serve on an unpaid voluntary basis.

School Funding

368. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount allocated per year in each primary school budget in County Kildare for its board of management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37906/17]

369. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount allocated per year in each secondary school budget in County Kildare for its board of management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37907/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 368 and 369 together.

Boards of Management of primary and voluntary secondary schools operate on a voluntary basis and should not therefore impact on school budgets.

Question No. 369 answered with Question No. 368.

School Transport Appeals

370. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an appeal (details supplied). [37948/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million km annually.

The School Transport Appeals Board, which is independent of my Department, has considered the appeal in question and the family have been notified of their decision.

Brexit Staff

371. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37990/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the direction of my Department's management board, the EU/International Unit under the leadership of a Deputy Secretary General is working with Departmental divisions and agencies on analysing and prioritising issues for input to the negotiation phase. Between December and January the unit oversaw extensive engagement that I and Minister of State, Deputy John Halligan had with the education sector in the form of four Brexit consultation fora for the higher, further education and training; and primary and post-primary education sectors. This was supplemented by a joint Enterprise Skills Brexit stakeholder consultation on 3 July 2017, led by the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, at which both I and Minister of State Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor participated.

The EU/International Unit has also supported my engagement at political and institutional level on our Brexit agenda. I have met counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and most recently met with the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. Meetings were also held with the former Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Keir Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. Meetings have also taken place with Ministers from other EU Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission including Commissioner Navracsics.

The EU/International Unit of my Department has been given overall responsibility for co-ordinating our response to Brexit. This Unit has been prioritising Brexit work to date and will keep staffing requirements under constant review.

In discharging its Brexit-related functions, the EU/International Unit participates in the Inter-Departmental senior officials group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, which co-ordinates the whole-of-Government response to the outcome of the UK referendum, and supports the Cabinet Committee on the European Union including Brexit. This is further underpinned by the unit's active engagement with other Departments in Brexit Workgroups on the Economy and Trade; the Common Travel Area; and European Union Programmes - three of the six sectorial workgroups established to provide key sectorial or thematic advices to the Cabinet Committee and Government. The unit also chairs the Education and Research subgroup under the Economy and Trade strand of co-ordination. The subgroup includes relevant areas within the Department and relevant agencies of the Department and other Departments/agencies.

As specific issues on the negotiations agenda emerge, the Department will ensure timely, focused inputs from the relevant policy areas and external stakeholders, through appropriate consultative mechanisms.

Significant additional resource requirements are not envisaged during the negotiation phase, but for those that will arise, it is anticipated that costs arising can be provided for from within existing Departmental budgets.

Brexit Staff

372. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38006/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the direction of my Department's management board, the EU/International unit under the leadership of a Deputy Secretary General has been given overall responsibility for co-ordinating our response to Brexit. This Unit has been prioritising Brexit work to date and will keep staffing requirements under constant review.

As specific issues on the negotiations agenda emerge, the Department will ensure timely, focused inputs from the relevant policy areas and external stakeholders, through appropriate consultative mechanisms.

Significant additional resource requirements are not envisaged during the negotiation phase, but for those that will arise, it is anticipated that costs arising can be provided for from within existing Departmental budgets.

Construction Costs

373. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38022/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The tender price index published by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland indicates recent construction inflation, averaged across the country, as follows:-

2015 - 5.47%

2016 - 6.34%

The society also forecasts construction inflation for the first half of 2017 at 3.02%. This would indicate an inflation predication for all of 2017 at around 6%. The Department's experience of construction inflation is broadly similar to the above indices.

The Department publishes a Basic Building Cost limit for primary and post primary schools which provides a guideline to design teams as to the level of specification and design that is appropriate for school buildings. The Basic Building Cost along with site specific Abnormal Costs, External Works costs and Fitted Furniture costs are used to calculate the predicted construction cost of a project ahead of a tender exercise.

The Department's Basic Building Cost limit was first introduced in 1975 (€136/m²). It reached a peak of €1,230/m² in June 2006. The cost limit was reduced for the first time ever in November 2009 to €990/m² (a 19.5% reduction) and again in January 2011 to €930/m² (a further 6% reduction). The Basic Building Cost limit has undergone three increases since then – April 2014 (€1,050/m², +12.9%), June 2015 (€1,150/m², +9.5%), February 2016 (€1,210/m², +5.2%) and June 2017 (€1,280, +5.8%) and currently stands at €1,280/m² .

It should be noted that a significant proportion of the recent increases relate to improvements in building standards and not just construction inflation.

The Basic Building Cost limit is regularly adjusted to take account of construction inflation and changes in building standards. The Department continuously monitors tender returns across all major school building projects, as well as trends in labour and materials costs, and periodically adjusts its Basic Building Cost limit accordingly

National Educational Psychological Service

374. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a new NEPS psychologist has been hired for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38056/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that a NEPS psychologist will be assigned to the school in question for the 2017/18 academic year. A communication to this effect will issue shortly to the school authorities concerned.

School Catchment Areas

375. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the new premises and site of a school (details supplied) must be located within the boundaries of the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning areas in view of concerns by existing secondary schools in Dublin 7 that the new second level school will be located in their school planning areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38057/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is included in the Department's six year construction programme.

Officials in my Department are liaising with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the school.

Potential site options within the boundaries of the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning areas were identified and, from these, a preferred option to accommodate the permanent school building has been selected.

Due to the commercially sensitive nature of site acquisitions generally, it is not possible to comment further at this stage however the school's patron will be informed of the intended location as soon as it is possible to do so.

School Curriculum

376. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that his Department has made in securing funding and resources for the introduction of coding to all primary schools by 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38058/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The NCCA is in the process of developing a new primary mathematics curriculum. Following my request to consider how children's computational, flexible and creative thinking skills might be developed through this new mathematics curriculum, and how coding might be integrated in the wider primary curriculum, the NCCA is reviewing curriculum policy and practice in other jurisdictions in terms of these areas of children's education at primary level.

Currently the PDST Technology in Education provide training for both primary and post primary teachers in ICT which includes 'Scratch' coding. 5,800 teachers received ICT training in 2016.

Furthermore, a large number of schools are running voluntary coding programmes through initiatives such as Coder Dojo (over 200 dojos in Ireland), Hour of Code, where over 200 events took place in Ireland and the annual computer programming olympiad held at Dublin City University.

Further resources in this area will be looked at in conjunction with the STEM Education policy statement and implementation plan, which I intend to finalise shortly.

Teachers' Remuneration

377. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's progress towards the restoration of pay equality for new entrants to the teaching profession since 2010. [38059/17]

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

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

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreements have, to date, restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and for apprenticeships.

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 January 2018 will be €35,958 and 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.

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

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

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

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

Further Education and Training Programmes Provision

378. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the latest CSO statistics in respect of the need for an additional further education and training facilities in Dublin west and east Meath in addition to the new further education campus at Dunboyne to provide QQI courses at levels 1 to 7, for apprenticeships and a range of skills deficit areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38060/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Through the annual service planning process that takes place each year between SOLAS and each Education and Training Board (ETB), ETBs are primarily responsible for the planning of provision to meet the identified needs of learners, enterprise and communities within their regions.

Since 2014, SOLAS and the ETBs work together to produce annual service plans that are informed by national policies and strategies and are grounded in an analysis of local skills demand and labour supply. In the context of this process, funding of the relevant resources is primarily a matter for Dublin Dún Laoghaire and Louth Meath ETB through their annual service planning engagement with SOLAS.

My Department's capital budget is currently fully committed. The Department and SOLAS will be reviewing capital requirements in the further education and training sector in the context of the Government's Mid Term Review of the Capital Plan.

Schools Building Projects Status

379. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposed redevelopment of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38061/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the facility to which she refers was included in my Department's six year capital programme.

The delivery of a building project necessitates the acquisition of a suitable site and my Department is in ongoing liaison with Louth Meath Education and Training Board in the matter.

Higher Education Authority

380. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the filling of vacancies on the Higher Education Authority board; the applications sought by the Public Appointments Service to fill vacancies by 7 July 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38062/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I have sought expressions of interest for two academic members to fill vacancies on the Higher Education Authority Board through the Public Appointments Service. The closing date for receipt of applications was 7 July 2017. A total of 39 applications were received.

The Assessment Panel has examined all applications and a list of potential candidates will be presented to me shortly.

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

Teacher Data

381. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of substitute teachers employed by school day on average; if his attention has been drawn to the acute shortage of teachers to fill substitute positions on a daily basis; his plans to address this serious issue for schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38063/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The average number of substitute teachers employed on a daily basis in primary schools is approximately 3,600. Information on the average number of substitute teachers employed on a daily basis in post primary schools is not readily available.

In overall terms, my Department has no evidence of a recent or current shortage of primary teachers. However, I am aware that some schools have experienced difficulty in recruiting adequately qualified substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

The final report of the Technical Working Group on teacher supply, 'Striking the Balance' was published on 9 June 2017. The report focusses on the development of a model of primary teacher supply, while outlining the work which will be required to establish a sustainable long term model of post primary teacher supply. In considering the model of teacher supply at primary level the report took account of many variables, including the number of additional teachers required to cover for teacher absences, such as illness, maternity leave, career break or secondment.

The report sets out an approach to planning the work necessary to develop a model for achieving a better balance between teacher supply and demand in the medium to long term.

Officials of my Department are now considering how the development of a model can be progressed, from within available resources. The necessary actions will include engagement with the HEA in order to ensure that the supply of teachers meets demand and there is the correct balance of teachers in each of the various subject areas at post primary level, as well as measures to address data requirements, particularly at post primary level.

The Deputy will be aware that, in conjunction with the publication of the report, I announced a number of measures to increase the pool of teachers available to schools, in particular to fill short term vacancies. With regard to these measures, my Department informed all teachers retiring in 2017 that in order to remain eligible for employment in a state funded teaching post for a period of more than five consecutive days or to supervise the State examinations, a teacher must maintain his/her registration with the Teaching Council. In that regard, the Teaching Council also reminds teachers, through the renewal of registration process and where a teacher indicates that he or she is considering leaving the register, that if they wish to continue to work as a teacher following retirement in substitute and other positions they should maintain registration.

The Deputy should note also that my Department has increased the limits for employment while on career break at post primary level to a maximum of 300 hours in a school year and at primary level to a maximum of 90 days in a school year. The matter of the employment of B.Ed and PME students in limited circumstances on a short term basis is still under consideration in

my Department.

Third Level Staff

382. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress his Department has made in respect of the implementation of the Cush Report regarding part time and fixed term employment in third level institutions and in particular her Department's request in June 2017 that third level institutions establish an adjudication system to hear disputes arising from the implementation of the Cush Report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38064/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Report of the Chair of the Expert Group on Fixed Term and Part-Time issues in Lecturing in Ireland was published in May 2016 and the Report contains a number of recommendations that will assist in addressing concerns raised about the level of part-time and fixed-term employment in lecturing in the third level sector. My Department issued directions to the sector on 4 July 2016 to implement the recommendations contained in the report in accordance with the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and my understanding is that the Institutions are taking steps to do so.

My officials also wrote to the universities on 27 June 2017 requesting that an adjudication system be established to hear any disputes arising from the implementation of the Cush Report.

I understand that the Irish Universities Association has been in contact with the trade unions in regard to the establishment of an adjudicator system with a view to operationalising the adjudication process at an early date.

School Patronage

383. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools under religious patronage he expects to be divested over the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38065/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of 21st century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

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

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

and Training Board sector and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to develop the process for the identification of demand for diversity at pre-school level.

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

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

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

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

School Curriculum

384. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the roll-out of the junior cycle process and the implementation of phase 3 from September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38066/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle continues to proceed and a number of new subject specifications – English, Science and Business Studies - have already been introduced. From September 2017, new specifications for Irish/Gaeilge, Modern Foreign Languages and Visual Art (formerly known as Art, Craft and Design) are being introduced under phase 3, together with the new area of learning entitled Well-being. Phase 4 sees the introduction of Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music and Geography.

Provisional examination results for Junior Certificate/Cycle 2017 are being issued by the State Examinations Commission on 13 September. This will be followed towards the end of the year by the issue to students by their schools of the first Junior Cycle Profiles of Achievement.

Departmental Circulars

385. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the preparation of draft guidelines for school buildings out of hours and the implementation of circular letter 16/05 regarding the use of schools for community and adult recreational purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38067/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that guidelines on the use of school buildings out of hours have been finalised by my Department and are due for publication shortly.

Legislative Process

386. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding his department's work on the General Scheme of Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38068/17]

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

On 18 July 2017 the Joint Committee on Education and Skills determined that the Bill did not require pre-legislative scrutiny.

The Bill has now been referred to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for the appointment of a legislative drafter.

Legislative Process

387. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Technological Universities Bill 2015; the timeframe for it to return to Dáil Éireann; his planned changes to the draft legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38069/17]

459. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans regarding the Technological Universities Bill 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38937/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 387 and 459 together.

The Government approved the drafting of insertions and amendments to the Technological Universities Bill 2015, as passed at Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann, on 11 July 2017. The approval is subject to any amendments, including any consequential amendments, deemed necessary by the Office of the Attorney General. Officials from my Department are currently consulting with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government on the drafting of insertions and amendments to the Bill. I intend to introduce the revised Bill at Committee Stage in the new Dáil session at the earliest possible juncture subject to the drafting process.

The main amendments proposed to the Bill are publicly available on the Department's website www.education.ie

Special Educational Needs Staff

388. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress the NCSE has made in processing late applications for SNAs for the 2017-18 school year; the number of decisions that have been appealed in respect of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38070/17]

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

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

The NCSE has advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

In circumstances where a school, or parent, is unhappy with the allocation of SNA support which has been made, or considers the level of support allocated is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the pupils concerned, the school or parent, may appeal that decision via the NCSE appeals process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie. The closing date for receipt of appeals is the 29th September 2017.

As the Deputy's question relates to applications for SNAs support and appeals in respect of same, the matter has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

Higher Education Institutions

389. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the terms of the agreement made between a university (details supplied) and an organisation regarding the use of St. Laurence's Church in Grangegorman; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38071/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education institutions such as Dublin Institute of Technology are autonomous bodies and are responsible for the day to day operations of the Institute including the use of buildings, procurement of goods and services, and provision of services for students.

Higher Education Institutions

390. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the person or body that has legal ownership of St. Laurence's Church in a campus (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38072/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The ownership of St Laurence's currently rests with the Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA) until such time as the campus is fully developed at which point it will revert to DIT. However, in line with the arrangements in place between the GDA and DIT, DIT is fully responsible for the operation of that building.

Question No. 391 answered with Question No. 342.

Site Acquisitions

392. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has had discussions with Fingal County Council regarding the location of the new second level school for the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38074/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for the new post primary school to serve Carpenterstown/Castleknock is included in the Department's 6 year construction programme.

Officials in the Department continue to liaise with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable location for the school and have identified a preferred site option in that regard.

Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time but the school patron will be informed of the proposed location for the school as soon as it is possible to do so.

Schools Building Projects Status

393. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the construction works to be carried out at a school (details supplied) as provided for under the capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38075/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Funding has been approved for the school to which the Deputy refers for an extension project. The project has been devolved for delivery to the school authority.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department recently gave approval for the project to proceed to tender.

School Accommodation Provision

394. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for an additional co-educational secondary school in the Dublin 15 area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38076/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from 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 is currently carrying out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.

As the Deputy may be aware, following completion of the 2016 patronage process for the nine new post-primary schools to be established in 2017 and 2018, I announced the Edmund Rice Schools Trust as the successful patron for the school to serve the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning areas. This school opened in interim accommodation in September

2017 at the Le Chéile Secondary School, Hollystown Road, Tyrrelstown, Dublin 15.

Question No. 395 answered with Question No. 342.

Schools Mental Health Strategies

396. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to develop mental health supports for second level students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38079/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department promotes a comprehensive and whole of school approach to the promotion of wellbeing and positive mental health. This approach considers the entire school community, as well as focusing on groups and individual young people with identified need. This approach spans the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support, pastoral care, guidance counselling and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves accessing other supports such as educational psychology services and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Additionally, schools engage in a wide range of sport and cultural activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth. The whole staff shares responsibility for general student wellbeing.

The Well-being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013) provides a framework for schools to present in an integrated way their existing good practice. The Guidelines promote social and emotional learning, and mental health and direct them to new practices, as appropriate.

The European wide HSE supported Health Promoting School Process (HSP) is also outlined, and the Well-being Guidelines show how the HSP can be introduced to schools to complement existing good practice. The Guidelines outline how schools support young people through early intervention and prevention, modelled on the NEPS Continuum of Support tiered approach.

The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including through the systematic implementation of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the whole-school guidance plan, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support model and the HSE, Health Promoting Schools Process. Information is also provided on how to access support from the Professional Development Service for Teachers' SPHE Support Service and other external agencies and support services.

More recently, my Department's Action Plan for Education 2017 promotes wellbeing as one of its key goals. Other actions, in addition to those outlined above, relating to wellbeing and mental health in the post-primary school sector include:

- Developing an integrated programme of support for all schools to implement the Wellbeing Guidelines and an implementation plan for roll-out of this programme to all post-primary schools.

- Increasing the capacity of NEPS: an enhanced educational psychological service to schools, through the appointment of an additional 11 educational psychologists. The focus of additional support will be on extending the delivery of training to teachers in DEIS schools.

There will be a suite of Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) supports provided to post-primary schools to enable them to implement the new National Council for Curriculum and Assess-

ment's Wellbeing Guidelines for Junior Cycle which are being introduced from this September for first years. These supports will range from a full day whole staff professional activity event, workshops varying in length from 2 hours to 1 day. The workshops will address the needs of both mainstream and special schools. There will be a dedicated wellbeing section on the JCT website full of resources to assist the implementation of wellbeing within the junior cycle. JCT will liaise closely with National Educational Psychological Service and the Health Service Executive as they develop their involvement in this very sensitive area.

Measures announced by my Department as part of Budget 2016 and 2017 mean that 400 guidance posts, or two thirds of the guidance allocation that was withdrawn in Budget 2012, will be restored to schools from September 2017. All of these 400 posts are allocated separately and transparently on the staffing schedule of posts for schools. The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) will revert to 19:1 with effect from September 2017 with the guidance allocation shown separately on the staffing schedules and will represent 0.4 of the PTR for each school. There is now an obligation on schools to ensure that the hours are used for guidance activities. Principals may decide to allocate more hours to guidance activities than the amount allocated on the schedule; they cannot decide to allocate fewer.

While most of the 400 posts restored over the past two years are likely to be allocated to guidance counsellors, schools may decide, in the context of their guidance plans, to allocate some resources to others who may also play a role in delivering guidance in the schools. However, my Department has made it clear that schools' guidance plans should include specified time allocation for guidance counsellors to be available for one-to-one guidance counselling and time allocation for the role in supporting the organisation and work of the Student Support Team.

School Transport

397. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of second level pupils granted school transport on the grounds of ethos of the school they are attending. [38117/17]

398. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of second level pupils who may have been refused school transport on grounds of the ethos of the school they are attending. [38118/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 397 and 398 together.

School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

In relation to school transport provision, ethos relates to religious ethos and is in the context of provision for minority religions.

The information requested is not available as it is not collected during the application process.

School Equipment

399. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which his Department plans to act on its responsibility regarding a healthy weight for all in respect of the provision of potable water in all learning centres; the way in which schools can apply for potable water aside from the emergency works scheme as none of the 12 categories under emergency works covers this area; if his Department has had contact with school authorities regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38127/17]

400. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 302 of 13 July 2017, if he will undertake a national audit of all learning centres, especially for persons under 18 years of age, in respect of the availability of potable water, in view of the fact that his Department's attention has not been drawn to schools in which there is no access to a drinking water supply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38128/17]

401. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on discussions with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency with a view to the implementation of the national strategy to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water, which involves the development of a national testing strategy and subsequent remediation programme; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38129/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 399 to 401, inclusive, together.

I can confirm that remediation for tap drinking water supplies is covered by my Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme under the "mechanical" category. Mechanical components of a building incorporate, among other things, all water systems, including tap drinking water supply. It is also open to schools to apply for remediation works under my Department's Summer Works Scheme which, likewise, has a "mechanical" category. Primary schools receive a minor works grant too which they can use for this purpose if they so wish.

In addition, drinking water systems are automatically included in new school buildings and extension projects. My Department has dedicated guidelines for Design Teams setting out the standards to be implemented for these construction projects and for all remediation projects.

Officials in my Department continue to engage with the National Strategy to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water in public buildings. This will ultimately lead to an approach for addressing this issue in schools. I have no plans to introduce an audit ahead of this. It will remain the position, however, that individual schools can apply to my Department for financial assistance to address their own particular tap drinking water issues, as has always been the case, or primary schools can use their minor works grant to deal with any such issues.

Public Services Card

402. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38146/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In line with the 2013 Government Decision, S180/20/10/1789, the Public Services Card (PSC) infrastructure is the Government's standard identity verification scheme, which is to be used for access to all public services, where appropriate. As such, the widespread adoption of the PSC infrastructure, including its online counterpart MyGovID, to underpin access to public services by citizens is critical to the successful delivery of the eGovernment strategy.

With effect from the 2018/19 academic year, MyGovID will be used by SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) as the user authentication mechanism, to provide access to the online student grants system. Student grant applicants will also have to be SAFE (Standard Authentication Framework Environment) registered in order to make an application.

Submission of a student grant appeal from the above academic year, will also require the appellant to be SAFE registered - this registration will already have been carried out prior to making the original grant application to SUSI. Online submission of an appeal will also use MyGovID as the user authentication mechanism.

Special Educational Needs

403. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will investigate the possibility of including sensory processing disorder as a qualifying medical condition for access to SNA support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38162/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support is provided specifically to assist recognised primary, post primary and special schools to cater for the care needs of pupils with disabilities in an educational context, where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

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

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. The Circular provides details of the primary care needs for which SNA support will usually be provided and details the types of secondary care associated tasks which SNAs may often perform.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additional SNA support is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources.

The consideration of professional reports is an integral part of determining the extent of supports to be provided for pupils with special educational needs; medical or relevant professional reports should indicate the outcome of assessments carried out and the range of needs of the child as clearly as possible, Health staff have, however, been directed by the HSE not to include references to the specific quantum of educational resources in their reports. Whereas professional reports provide valuable assistance to education providers in identifying a diagnosis or identifying appropriate interventions, the Health professional will not have knowledge or awareness of the current resources available to a school to cater for these care needs, will not be aware of the layout of the school, or have had an opportunity to observe the child in class or observe their interaction with their teachers and classmates on an ongoing basis.

It should be noted that SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

The NCSE has advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

In circumstances where a school, or parent, is unhappy with the allocation of SNA support which has been made, or considers the level of support allocated is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the pupils concerned, the school or parent, may appeal that decision via the NCSE appeals process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie. The closing date for receipt of appeals is the 29th September 2017.

School Accommodation

404. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on the additional accommodation application by a school (details supplied); when decisions on applications for the summer works scheme will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38163/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department approved funding for the construction of one mainstream classroom at the school in question to facilitate a new teacher appointment from September 2016.

I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has subsequently received an application for a further mainstream classroom. The application is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the management of the school when the assessment process is completed.

The Deputy will be aware that I announced details of the successful applicants under round two of the SWS (2016-2017) for categories 3 – 6, last May, details of which are published on my Department's website, www.education.ie.

Funding of €47 million is being made available and 438 schools nationwide will benefit from this announcement.

In total, funding of almost €80 million has now been approved in respect of 635 schools for

Categories 1 to 6 under the multi-annual Summer Works Scheme (2016-2017). Nearly 50% of all schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Applications under further categories will be considered in the event of further funding becoming available.

Departmental Properties

405. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in his Department in releasing its interest in a school building (details supplied) which is to be acquired and used as a community facility. [38192/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is a charging lease in place on the property referred to by the Deputy which means that I have a vested interest in the property. I can confirm that my Department has received a request from the property owner to release my interest.

Officials in my Department have been in contact with the property owner to inform them of the steps which will need to be taken on their part in order to release my interest in the property. The Chief State Solicitor's Office have been instructed to progress matters on this basis.

School Closures

406. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school closures where there are 30 or more students for the 2017-18 academic year and the 2016-17 academic year respectively, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38203/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to clarify for the Deputy that there were no primary school closures with 30 or more students for the school years 2016/2017 or 2017/2018.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is very aware of the importance of small schools to rural communities and particularly the most dispersed and remote communities. To provide such communities with security about the future of their schools, a commitment is contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government not to close any small school without the consent of parents.

In that regard, there were 3 primary school closures in school year 2016/17 and one primary school closure in school year 2017/18. These schools, which did not have sustainable pupil numbers, closed with the agreement of the Patrons concerned.

School Accommodation

407. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of additional accommodation for a national school (details supplied) in County Mayo. [38222/17]

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

Schools Inspections

408. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in each county that have been inspected by fire officials and failed safety standards following new builds and extensions, in tabular form. [38228/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department published fire safety reports for each of five school buildings constructed in 2008 where following fire safety inspection audits carried out by a consultant appointed by the Department, issues have been identified in respect of the compliance with their fire safety certificates. The five primary school buildings in question are:

County	Name of School
Dublin	Powerstown ETNS, Dublin
Dublin	Belmayne Educate Together NS, Dublin
Dublin	St Francis of Assisi, National School, Belmayne, Dublin
Westmeath	Mullingar Educate Together NS
Wicklow	Gaelscoil Clocha Liatha, Greystones

School Transport Administration

409. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the changes in the school transport scheme that have been made in the past 12 months; and the engagement taken with stakeholders in the scheme. [38239/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

There have been no changes to the eligibility criteria for school transport in the past 12 months.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes continue to be applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Provision

410. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason additional buses or larger buses cannot be put on for children in areas in which demand is high for concessionary students that have already paid. [38240/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

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

In general, children are eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school.

Children who are 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.

Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes routes will not be extended or altered, additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis; no additional State cost will be incurred.

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

Families who have paid the annual charge but were not allocated a seat on the school bus will receive a refund from Bus Éireann.

School Transport Provision

411. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) whose family has paid for a ticket for school transport is not being facilitated or an additional service offered in view of the fact that the bus ticket is paid for. [38241/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

While it is the prerogative of parents to choose the school that they wish their children to attend, eligibility for school transport is determined by the distance that children reside from their nearest school.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question is not eligible for school transport as she is not attending her nearest school.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge. Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

In this case, the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available on an existing service.

The child in question was not allocated a seat during the subsequent selection process and the family have been refunded their payment.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Provision

412. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) whose family has paid for a ticket for school transport is not being facilitated or an additional service offered in view of the fact that the bus ticket is paid for. [38242/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms the Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest education centre as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

Bus Éireann has advised that the child in question is not eligible for school transport as she is not attending her nearest school.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge. Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

In this case, the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available on an existing service.

The child in question was not allocated a seat during the subsequent selection process and the family have been refunded their payment.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Provision

413. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason persons (details supplied) whose family has paid for a ticket for school transport are not being facilitated or an additional service offered in view of the fact that the bus ticket is paid for. [38243/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme Children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

Bus Éireann has advised that the family in question are not eligible for school transport as they do not meet the distance criteria.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge. Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

In this case, the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available on an existing service.

The family in question were not allocated seats during the subsequent selection process and they have been refunded their payment.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Provision

414. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason persons (details supplied) whose family has paid for a ticket for school transport are not being facilitated or an additional service offered in view of the fact that the bus ticket is paid for. [38244/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children

with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of the Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann.

Bus Éireann has advised that the family in question are not eligible for school transport as they do not meet the distance criterion.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may apply for transport on a concessionary basis only which is subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats on an existing service and payment of the annual charge. Under the terms of the School Transport Schemes additional vehicles will not be introduced, nor will larger vehicles or extra trips using existing vehicles be provided to cater for children travelling on a concessionary basis.

In this case, the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available on an existing service.

The family in question were not allocated seats during the subsequent selection process and they have been refunded their payment.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Apprenticeship Programmes

415. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 337 of 13 July 2017, the amount of the 2017 budget allocation made available for apprenticeship training that has been expended to date in 2017. [38291/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): At the end of August 2017 €65.55 million has been paid from the National Training Fund and the Exchequer for apprenticeship training.

Teachers' Remuneration

416. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if days worked in a primary school by a person (details supplied) while employed and paid directly by the board of management can be counted towards a teacher's service, thus enabling them to move to a higher point of the pay scale; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38294/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria for the award of Incremental Credit to recognised Primary teachers are set out in circulars 10/2001 and 29/2010 and were agreed under the auspices of the Teacher Conciliation Council.

No application has been received to date in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy. An award for incremental credit may only be considered on foot of an application to my Department. She will need to complete in full the application form and have her previous employer(s) forward it to Incremental Credit Unit, Department Education & Skills, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 X659. Application forms are available on my Department's

web page.

Departmental Staff Data

417. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual percentage of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies staff under the remit of his Department that were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38361/17]

418. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the annual percentage of public service staff that were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38384/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 417 and 418 together.

The information on gender breakdown sought by the Deputy in regard to public service staff in non-commercial State Bodies is not collated by the Department or Bodies and it would be a significant administrative undertaking to collate the data sought for the years in question.

For the Deputy's information, in addition to the provision of Statutory financial information, each Government Department/Office's annual Appropriation Accounts set out a range of information in notes to the annual accounts. The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General publishes the Appropriation Accounts annually by September 30th in line with statutory requirements.

Details in regard to the employee numbers relating to my Department and its associated State Bodies are published annually in the notes to the Appropriation Accounts.

The Appropriation Accounts for years prior to 2016 are available for download at the following address: <http://audgen.gov.ie/documents/annualreports>. The 2016 Appropriation Accounts will be published by the Comptroller by end September 2017.

Schools Building Projects Status

419. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the extension for a school (details supplied); the stage it is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38396/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021).

Arrangements are being made to finalise the project brief for the school concerned with the aim of progressing the project into architectural planning.

Schools Inspections

420. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools included in the most recent fire safety audits commissioned by his Department; if it included both primary and secondary schools; if he will provide a list of the schools in breach of existing fire regulations and the breaches involved; if the parents, teachers and school board of man-

agement have been informed of the fire regulation breaches; and the new measures he plans to introduce in view of this fire safety review and its outcome. [38399/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department published fire safety reports for each of five school buildings constructed in 2008 where issues have been identified in respect of the compliance with their fire safety certificates.

The five primary school buildings in question are:

Powerstown ETNS, Dublin (Temp - Replaced in August 2016)

Gaelscoil Clocha Liatha, Greystones (Permanent – extended 2016)

Mullingar Educate Together NS (Permanent – being extended)

Belmayne Educate Together NS, Dublin (Temp - to be replaced in 2018)

St Francis of Assisi, National School, Belmayne, Dublin (Temp - to be replaced in 2018)

In summary, the findings of the Fire Safety reports indicated issues of insufficient compliance with some requirements of the fire safety certificates in relation to fire retardation in those buildings. The reports found that while the designs which underpinned the Fire Safety Certificates required that the buildings would provide 60 minutes of retardation to facilitate evacuation, the actual quality of construction indicated a level of retardation less than this.

It is important to note – this is not a finding that the buildings are dangerous; it is a finding that the buildings do not comply with the detailed requirements of the Fire Safety Certificates.

The full recommendations and conclusions are outlined in the Fire Safety Reports for the five school buildings, which are available on the Department’s website at <https://www.education.ie/en/School-Design/Building-Works/>.

My Department has forwarded a copy of the relevant Fire Safety Report to each School/BoM for their information.

My Department will commission fire safety audits of a representative sample of up to 25 schools built over the past 20 years. This audit is a proactive, extra precaution prompted by recent concerns over the fire safety of public buildings both in this country and the UK. Regarding the list of schools to be examined, this sample has not yet been chosen but will comprise a representative sample of school types and locations and methods of construction over the past 20 years, including WBS and other contractors. The schools to be audited are not restricted to schools built under the Departments “Design & Build” programme but will be representative of all methods of construction. It should be noted that the selection of a school to be audited under this initiative in no way means that the Department has concern about that particular school.

Schools Building Contractors

421. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the building companies involved in building new schools that have been found to have breaches of fire regulations in the most recent fire safety audits commissioned by his Department; and if he will list the schools involved. [38400/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Department published fire safety reports for each of five school buildings constructed in 2008 where issues have been

identified in respect of the compliance with their fire safety certificates.

The school buildings in question are:

Powerstown ETNS, Dublin, (Temp - Replaced in August 2016)

Gaelscoil Clocha Liatha, Greystones (Permanent – extended 2016)

Mullingar Educate Together NS (Permanent – being extended)

Belmayne Educate Together NS, Dublin (Temp - to be replaced in 2018)

St Francis of Assisi, National School, Belmayne, Dublin (Temp - to be replaced in 2018)

The buildings were all constructed by Western Building System Ltd. (WBS) under the Department's Rapid – Design & Build programme in 2008.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

422. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an adult can be kept as a dependant ad infinitum under SUSI (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38412/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): For student grant purposes, students are categorised according to their circumstances either as students dependent on parents or a legal guardian, or as independent mature students.

For a dependent student, the reckonable income for grant purposes includes both his/her own income and that of his/her parents/legal guardians.

A student may be assessed as an independent mature student if he or she has attained the age of 23 on the 1st January of the year of first entry to an approved course, or of re-entry following a break in studies of at least three years, and is not ordinarily resident with his/her parents from the previous October. Otherwise he or she would continue to be assessed on the basis of parental income.

An applicant's class is defined at his/her first point of entry to an approved higher or further education course and this will continue to apply for the duration of his/her studies.

While it is not possible to appeal an applicant's class during the course of his/her studies, an applicant may be assessed or re-assessed by the awarding authority in the event of a change of circumstances relating to the following:

- Permanent change in reckonable income;
- Number of dependent children residing in the household;
- Commencement of an approved course;
- Normal residence;
- Nationality or immigration status;
- Change of course or institution.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant on the grounds of his/her initial classification as an independent or dependent student, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board at www.studentgrantappeals.ie within the required timeframe.

Autism Support Services

423. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the autistic unit will open for students in a school (details supplied). [38422/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The ASD unit referred to by the Deputy is part of a larger multi school project. This school project is currently at Stage 2A - Developed Sketch Design.

An initial Stage 2A stakeholders meeting was held on this project last November and a number of issues with the proposal were highlighted to the Board of Management and Design Team. A revised Stage 2A submission was requested to be submitted. This revised submission is still awaited.

The Design Team has informed my Department that the revised Stage 2A submission is nearing completion and it is anticipated this will, in the next number of weeks, be sent to the Department for review.

Student Support Schemes

424. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports available to deaf parents of hearing children who study through the medium of Irish in order to assist them at home with their studies; if supports are available from the home tuition department for these families in these circumstances and the application requirements for same; and his views on whether, in circumstances in which supports may not exist for deaf parents of hearing children who study through Irish, both children and parents are being impacted negatively and are at a disadvantage. [38435/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In keeping with the Irish Constitution, which states that parents have primary responsibility for educating their child, parents can choose what school to send their child to, including choosing to educate their child through the medium of Irish.

My Department does not provide supports for parents of children who study through the medium of Irish in order to assist them at home with their studies, including parents who are deaf.

The Irish Sign Language (ISL) tuition scheme operated by my Department provides funding for a weekly tuition service whereby a tutor visits the home of a hearing impaired pre-school or school-going child to provide training in ISL for the child, their sibling(s) and parent(s)/guardian(s). This service is available from the time of diagnosis until the child completes their post primary education. This service is not intended for parents who are deaf of hearing children.

School Accommodation Provision

425. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that has been made in securing permanent accommodation for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38503/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board is continuing to examine the options for accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy which will involve consideration of the timing and availability of appropriate infrastructure in the area.

My Department will continue to work closely with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation for the establishment of the school.

Schools Building Projects

426. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when tenders will be invited for a project (details supplied) in view of the fact that planning permission was granted for a school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38504/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project at the school referred to by the Deputy will provide a new 3 storey Primary School comprising 24 Classrooms and also includes a Special Needs Unit.

The project is currently at Stage 2B - Detailed Design of Architectural Planning, which includes applications for all statutory consents including Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate and the preparation of tender documentation. Planning Permission was granted on 1st August 2017.

The design team are currently working on completing Stage 2B of the architectural planning process. When complete the stage 2(b) report will be submitted to my Department. When this submission has been received and reviewed my Department will then be in further contact with the school authorities as regards the progression of the project to tender and construction stages.

This project is included in my Department's 6 year School Building Programme announced in November 2015.

Schools Building Projects

427. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when tenders will be invited for the project for a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that planning permission was granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38505/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The initial grant of planning was received on 27th July and the final decision is awaited. When received the project will then proceed to tender stage. It is expected that the tenders will issue in quarter 4 and that construction will commence in early 2018.

Schools Building Projects Status

428. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has completed the schedule of accommodation requirements for the extension to a school (details supplied); if so, the details of the accommodation requirements agreed; if not, when the schedule will be completed; when a design team will be appointed for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38506/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

Preparatory work has been initiated to advance the project and my Department will continue to liaise directly with the school authority concerned in the context of progressing the project through the architectural planning process.

Question No. 429 answered with Question No. 303.

Schools Building Projects

430. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure building works can be completed at a school in County Cork (details supplied); if he will provide the necessary additional funding to enable the school to build the carpark it requires; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that funding for this cannot be obtained from already allocated grant aid in view of the fact it has already been accounted for. [38537/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The proposal from the school to which the Deputy refers for an extension project have been examined in my Department. The part of the proposal relating to a new car parking facility is not acceptable to my Department as this involves works extraneous to the school site which are appropriate to the local authority. The works in question include putting traffic calming measures in place in a housing area through which it is proposed that all school traffic would flow and building a new road.

My Department is of the view that the school has not examined all on-site design solutions to deliver its extension project and car parking requirements. In the circumstances, my Department has requested the school to examine and provide details of three named options in this regard for consideration by the Department.

When this information has been received, the matter can be considered further.

Schools Building Projects Status

431. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress regarding the schedule being followed in respect of a permanent building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38546/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the new permanent school referred to in the question commenced construction on 28th August 2017.

Schools Building Projects Status

432. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a new school building (details supplied); the date on which the application was received; the detail of same; the stage at which it is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38575/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme (2016-2021). The major project will provide for partial roof replacement and electrical works. This project has progressed into architectural planning. In that regard, I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is not in receipt of an application for a new school building.

Special Educational Needs Staff Data

433. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of special needs assistants employed in primary schools in the Tallaght area, by school, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38582/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In July 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 SNA allocations which have been made to schools have also been published by the NCSE on their website. Details of the allocations to primary schools, including schools in Tallaght, are available at the following link http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Allocation-Primary.pdf.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

In circumstances where a school, or parent, is unhappy with the allocation of SNA support which has been made, or considers the level of SNA support allocated is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the pupils concerned, the school or parent may appeal that decision via the NCSE appeals process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie. The closing date for receipt of appeals is the 29th September 2017. Where a school submits an appeal the SENO would review the care needs of the children in the school and the allocation of SNA support to meet their care needs.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

434. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools in Dublin South-West in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; if there has been an improvement in the pupil-teacher ratio in Dublin South-West primary schools in that time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38583/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is calculated at each level by dividing the total number of pupils by the total number of allocated posts (classroom teachers and support teachers). This calculation differs from other such calculations (for example the staffing schedule at primary level which is the basis for allocating classroom teachers to each school based on their enrolments).

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to schools, including information on pupil teacher ratio at both primary and secondary level.

School Staff

435. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of non-permanent teaching staff in the Dublin South-West in primary and post-primary schools, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38584/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information as requested by the Deputy is not available in my Department.

Schools Building Projects Data

436. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 10 of 6 July 2017, if a building project at a school (details supplied) will proceed to construction stage at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38600/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Stage 2(b) Detailed Design Report for the major building project at the school to which the Deputy refers has recently been reviewed by my Department and comments on the report issued to the Board of Management in July 2017. A response to these comments is awaited from the Board of Management and its Design Team.

In parallel, the Board of Management and its Design Team are currently finalising the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered.

Once these steps are finalised my Department will then revert to the school with a timeframe to proceed to tender and construction stage.

Schools Building Projects

437. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new schools to be constructed as a regional solution in 2017 and 2018; the definition of a regional solution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38620/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In order to plan for school provision, my Department carries out demographic exercises based on 314 school planning areas across the country. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from 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 lev-

el to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of the additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

Utilising existing unused capacity with a school or schools,

Extending the capacity of a school or schools,

Provision of a new school(s).

In some instances, while projected growth in a single school planning area may not, of itself, warrant provision of a new school, where the combined demographic increases across a number of adjacent school planning areas indicate sufficient demand for a viable school, a regional solution may be put in place to serve these areas.

As the Deputy may be aware, on foot of the last nationwide demographic exercises, the establishment of four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools to open in 2017 and 2018 was announced. A number of these schools were announced as regional solutions to serve a number of school planning areas under increased demographic pressure as follows:

Carpenterstown & Castleknock, Dublin 15 (post-primary);

Dublin South City Centre (post-primary); and

Dublin South City Centre (primary).

These new schools will open in suitable interim accommodation pending delivery of their permanent accommodation.

Schools Health and Safety

438. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the actions taken by his Department to remediate fire safety concerns in a school (details supplied) upon publication of the fire safety compliance report on 5 July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38638/17]

439. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the supports offered to schools (details supplied) since the discovery that these schools are not fire compliant; the cost that will be incurred to make these schools fire compliant; the target set for completion of these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38642/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 438 and 439 together.

Since the publication of the reports on Friday 1st September 2017, in addition to written and verbal communication with the schools in question, an official of my Department and the Department's Fire Consultant have met with the school authorities and briefed them on the progress on the fire safety remediation works.

The relevant Fire Safety Reports have been issued to the Fire Officer and discussed accordingly. A subsequent scope of works as agreed between the Department's consultants and WBS contractors has issued to the Fire Officer and works to close out the identified issues are now in progress.

The DCC Fire Officer has agreed that the approach the Department is taking with regard to addressing the issues identified in the Reports is appropriate.

Following completion the works will be inspected by the Department's Consultant. As building owner, WBS will then issue a closing report to the Fire Officer detailing how the works ensure that the buildings then meet the requirements of the Fire Certificate.

The schools were advised of the intended timescale for WBS to complete the remaining fire stopping items over the weekends of the 9th & 10th and 16th & 17th of September.

My Department will then arrange a follow up meeting with the Fire Officer in early October to ensure DCC are in approval and formally close out the issues.

The schools are owned by WBS and the latter will carry the cost of the works being undertaken.

School Staff

440. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine an appeal by a school (details supplied) in connection with its application for an additional teacher for the 2017-2018 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38669/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its upcoming October meeting.

The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes

441. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the High Court ruling of 24 April 2017 in case No. 2015/4715P, relating to the renewal of safety registration cards by SOLAS; if fees and training are still being sought for the renewal of safe pass cards; if so, his plans to end this practice in view of the High Court ruling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38670/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The recent order of the High Court in the proceedings brought against SOLAS concerns renewal of registration cards issued under the Construction Skills Certification and Quarry Skills Certification Schemes. That order had no application in relation to the SafePass scheme and safety awareness training is required to be undertaken by construction workers every 4 years. This is important in maintaining awareness of current and emerging health and safety requirements in the construction sector and in preventing deaths and injuries on construction sites.

SOLAS Training and Education Programmes

442. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of safe pass cards that have been renewed by SOLAS since 24 April 2017. [38671/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): SOLAS has informed that the information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of Safepass cards that have been renewed since the 24th April 2017 is not readily available.

SOLAS are collating this data and I have asked them to forward it directly to the Deputy when compiled.

Brexit Issues

443. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38692/17]

444. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38708/17]

445. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38724/17]

446. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38740/17]

447. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38756/17]

448. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38772/17]

449. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38804/17]

450. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit-related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38820/17]

451. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38836/17]

452. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38852/17]

453. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the planned meetings with his European colleagues and officials to address Brexit-related issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38868/17]

454. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the Brexit-related research being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38884/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 443 to 454, inclusive, together.

The comprehensive document “Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union: The Government’s Approach” published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government’s National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government’s continuing work to ensure that Ireland’s interests are reflected in the EU’s approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland’s strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland’s wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, in-

cluding the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

Adopting a proactive approach from the start, the Irish Government put in place a contingency framework that maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. My own Department contributed fully to the preparation of the education components of that framework.

Our work has been facilitated by the EU/International Unit of my Department which, under the leadership of a Deputy Secretary General, has been given overall responsibility for co-ordinating our response to Brexit. This Unit has been prioritising Brexit work to date and will keep staffing requirements under constant review. At this stage, it is anticipated that any additional needs arising can be provided for from within existing Departmental resources.

In discharging its Brexit-related functions, the EU/International Unit participates in the Inter-Departmental Senior Officials Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, which coordinates the whole-of-Government response to the outcome of the UK referendum, and supports the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. This is further underpinned by the Unit's active engagement with other Departments in Brexit Workgroups on the Economy and Trade; the Common Travel Area; and European Union Programmes - three of the six sectoral workgroups established to provide key sectoral or thematic advices to the Cabinet Committee and Government. The Unit also chairs the Education and Research Subgroup under the Economy and Trade strand of co-ordination. The Subgroup includes relevant areas within the Department and relevant Agencies of the Department and other Departments/Agencies.

Meetings of the Education and Research Subgroup of the Economy and Trade Group took place on 28th October 2016, 15th February and 24th May 2017 and principally reflected on stakeholder consultations input and research collaboration. The next meeting of the sub-group is planned for September.

It is my priority to continue to engage actively on a number of fronts in dealing with the impact of Brexit on the Education sector. Consultation has been fundamental to my Department's preparations for Brexit. We have consulted extensively with our stakeholders. Between December and January both I and Minister of State Halligan have led consultations with stakeholders from right across the higher education, further education and training; and primary and post-primary education sectors. More recently, on the 3rd July 2017, the Tánaiste, and Minister for Enterprise and Innovation Frances Fitzgerald TD, and I co-hosted a joint stakeholder dialogue on enterprise skills needs and Brexit. A further joint stakeholder dialogue on research with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is also being planned.

Among the key challenges and risks identified in these consultations are Brexit's likely impact on the future of the Common Travel Area and its implications for students, teachers, academic staff and researchers; mutual recognition of qualifications; our enterprise skills base; UK/Ireland research collaboration and partnerships between education institutions and enterprise; as well as the implications for EU funding for research and the impact on EU funding programmes such as Horizon2020, PEACE IV and Erasmus+.

All of these issues will be factored in to my Department's overall approach to future discussions and negotiations and our input to Government's preparations for EU-UK negotiations including the finalisation of our sectoral response plan. Both I and my Department will continue to consult with the sector interests as necessary through the period ahead.

I have attached particular importance to engagement at political and institutional level on our Brexit agenda. I have met counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. Meetings were also held with the former Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Keir Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. Meetings have also taken place with Ministers from other EU Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission including Commissioner Navracsics.

All of this work is ongoing and must also respond to the emerging developments in the Brexit negotiations. My Department will work to ensure appropriate timely inputs to the current negotiations including the work of the Barnier taskforce.

While Brexit presents numerous challenges, it is likely to bring opportunities too. There may be opportunities for researchers and companies in Ireland to secure a greater percentage of EU funding due to the decrease in competition. Ireland already has well-diversified research partnerships across member states other than the UK.

There may be new research opportunities for Ireland as a remaining member of the EU and participant in the Horizon 2020 programme to build new collaborations with other EU universities/HEIs and industry. These opportunities will be maximised. The Government will work constructively to maintain the greatest possible links and co-operation between the EU and the UK in access to EU programmes.

With a view to leveraging potential opportunities the Action Plan for Education 2017 includes an action to develop a strategy to attract world-leading researchers to Ireland in the context of Brexit. Funding of €1.5m was provided in Budget 2017 for the Irish Research Council's Frontier Research Programme, one of the key actions to be delivered under Innovation 2020; Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology.

There may also be opportunities to increase the numbers of international students choosing Ireland in the wake of Brexit and this is factored into the implementation work underway led by my Department, working with the sector, in the delivery of the actions in the International Education Strategy 2016-2020.

I will keep under review the necessity for further allocations of funds as circumstances develop.

Departmental Expenditure

455. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38900/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report published in July, sets out the Pre-Budget Ceiling of €8,901 million current and €717 million capital for the Department of Education and Skills for 2018. The amount included in this ceiling reflects certain demographic pressures arising in the Education Sector.

As outlined in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, the increases planned in expenditure for the delivery of public services are set at sustainable levels in order to ensure that the resources allocated are affordable both now and in the future. Consequently, it is important that there is an ongoing focus on the totality of Departmental spending and not just the incremental increase each year.

As part of the Estimates process the Department considers expenditure on existing services alongside proposals for new expenditure measures. Any savings relating to the cost of existing services identified during this process can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space. Work is ongoing in this regard.

Schools Health and Safety

456. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements in place to review and monitor fire safety in schools on a continuous basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38934/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Fire Safety in all buildings, including schools, is covered by the States Building Regulations. Schools are dealt with in exactly the same way as any other buildings under the State's Building Regulations.

The amendments to the Building Regulations BC(A)R 2014 which came into force in March 2014 introduced a system of certification requiring those professionals involved in the design and construction of buildings to certify compliance with the Building Regulations before a building can be occupied. This includes certifying compliance with Part B of the Building Regulations 1997 which deals with Fire Safety.

My Department will commission fire safety audits of a representative sample of up to 25 schools built over the past 20 years. This audit is a proactive, extra precaution prompted by recent concerns over the fire safety of public buildings both in this country and the UK. Regarding the list of schools to be examined, this sample has not yet been chosen but will comprise a representative sample of school types and locations and methods of construction over the past 20 years, including WBS and other contractors. The schools to be audited are not restricted to schools built under the Departments "Design & Build" programme but will be representative of all methods of construction. It should be noted that the selection of a school to be audited under this initiative in no way means that the Department has concern about that particular school.

My Department is also conducting a review of all major school building projects currently under construction in order to ensure that design teams and contractors are fully engaging in a complete and comprehensive way with the inspection and certification requirements of BC(A) R 2014, particularly with regard to certifying compliance with Part B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations 1997.

This will cover all major school building projects currently under construction including where the Department is not the building owner.

With regard to continuous monitoring of fire safety issues, individual school management authorities are best placed to monitor fire safety issues in their respective schools on a day to day basis.

A Detailed guidance document is in place to advise schools on Managing Safety and Health in Schools. This includes comprehensive advice on the issue of managing the risk of fire safety. The document is a publication of the Health and Safety Authority in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills, the State Claims Agency and the School Development Planning Initiative.

These Guidelines were developed in response to a demand from the education sector for guidance and clarification in relation to the legal obligations and responsibilities that have been placed on schools. This demand, combined with the recognition that workplace safety, health

and welfare needs to be managed and can be integrated into existing planning processes at school level, was at the core of the collaboration between the partners involved.

The Guidelines may be accessed at the following link:

http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Education/Managing_Safety_and_Health_in_Schools/Primary_Schools_Guidelines/Guidelines_on_Managing_Safety_Health_and_Welfare_in_Primary_Schools.pdf.

If any school authority has concerns about fire safety with regard to its school buildings it may wish to commission a fire safety audit report to determine if such concerns are significant.

My Department will consider any request from a school authority to address such issues on receipt of an appropriately informed and supported application for funding.

My Department is always conscious of the need to ensure the maximum efficiency and security with regard to Health and Safety in our schools. In light of the concerns expressed both in Ireland and abroad in relation to fire safety in public buildings my Department will continue to examine ways in which improvements in process and procedures can be brought about.

School Accommodation

457. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding prefabs in schools; the number of prefabs in use; the number of prefabs rented by his Department on behalf of schools; the identity of such schools by county; the age of such prefabs; the expected further life of such prefabs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38935/17]

458. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the programme to phase out prefabs in schools and replace them with permanent buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38936/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 457 and 458 together.

Under the Department's 6-year capital investment programme (2016-2021) and in accordance with the Programme for Government, a multi-annual funding provision of €180 million is being made available from 2019 to replace school prefabs with permanent accommodation. To enable this development, the Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum and to determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each school involved.

When the numbers and types of prefabs to be replaced have been identified by the Department, it will be possible to calculate a cost estimate of the number of units to be replaced taking into account that the outlay for replacing a prefab with a permanent building will vary from school to school depending on type and extent of prefab unit, planning conditions and other site specific costs. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs that can be replaced within overall available funding.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the information sought in regard to rental prefabs is being compiled, and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible

Question No. 459 answered with Question No. 387.

Schools Building Projects Status

460. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction work will begin on a new school (details supplied); the reason delays have occurred on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38968/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Tender Process for this school project is currently in progress. The invitation to tender issued on 21/8/17 and tenders are due back 2/10/17.

When the tender process is complete the project will then proceed to construction.

School Transport Eligibility

461. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a bus ticket for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [38972/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of the Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are generally eligible for school transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest school.

The child in question is not eligible for school transport as he resides less than 4.8 kilometres from his school of attendance.

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.

Bus Éireann has advised that there are seats available on an existing service and the family should liaise with their local Bus Éireann office if they wish to avail of transport on a concessionary basis.

Only children who are eligible for school transport and who hold valid medical cards (GMS Scheme) are exempt from paying the annual charge.

The terms of the Post Primary School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Eligibility

462. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address a matter regarding a school ticket for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [38973/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Under the terms of the School Transport Scheme children are generally eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school.

The child in question is not attending her nearest school and is therefore not eligible for school transport.

Children who are not eligible for school transport may avail of transport on a concessionary basis only subject to a number of terms and conditions including the availability of spare seats on existing service.

However, Bus Éireann has advised that there is no mainstream school transport service operating from the area that can accommodate this child.

The service referred to by the Deputy is a dedicated school transport service for children with special educational needs; these services are tailored to meet the specific care and welfare needs of these children only.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Transport Fees

463. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a school transport refund will be paid to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38975/17]

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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Bus Éireann has advised that the payment in question will be refunded in the next few days.

Teachers' Remuneration

464. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason payment for work carried out as part of the July provision is not issued until November; if his attention has been drawn to the financial difficulties this can cause for SNAs who do not have an alternative form of income or are looking for work; the steps he is taking to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39001/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The July Education Programme is available to all special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes catering for children with autism that choose to extend their education services through the month of July. The programme is also available for pupils with a severe/profound general learning disability.

Where a school chooses not to extend their services for July, all eligible children are granted home based July provision, on application.

This year's common pay date of 2nd November 2017 was well advertised prior to the start of the July Education Programme.

In 2016 over 8,700 children benefitted from the July Education Programme. This resulted in approximately 8,300 payments being issued.

Visa Agreements

465. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to modify the upper age limit to 35 years of age for Australian citizens applying for a working holiday visa here, in line with the new Australian working holiday visa regulations (details supplied) which increase eligibility for Irish citizens to 35 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37088/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): This matter is still under consideration by the Australian Government, which is looking at options for expanding the upper age of eligibility for its Working Holiday Visa Programme from 30 to 35 years, including timeframes, legislative requirements and engagement with partner countries.

As there has yet been no change yet to the age of eligibility, it would be premature for me to comment on how Ireland would respond to such a change. The current age of eligibility for Australia's Working Holiday Visa programme remains between 18 and 30 years of age.

The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection has noted that reciprocity of arrangements for Australian citizens is a key feature of this programme. Reciprocity of arrangements for Irish citizens is similarly a key feature of Ireland's Working Holiday Authorisation programme.

Military Aircraft Landings

466. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will ensure that Shannon Airport will not be used for current and future military interventions by foreign interests in view of the United States' recent announcement to expand military intervention in Afghanistan,; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37572/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Air Navigation (Foreign Military Aircraft) Order 1952, made under the Air Navigation and Transport Act 1946, gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs primary responsibility for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft in Ireland.

Successive Governments have made landing facilities available at Shannon Airport to the United States for well over 50 years. These arrangements are governed by strict conditions, including that the aircraft must be unarmed, carry no arms, ammunition or explosives, that they

do not engage in intelligence gathering and that the flights concerned do not form part of military exercises or operations.

These conditions apply equally to military aircraft from all countries seeking to land in Shannon. The US, as with all other states, is required to provide my Department with confirmation in writing that the aircraft proposing to land in Shannon complies with the strict conditions set out above.

Arrangements for the regulation of activity by foreign military aircraft are kept under ongoing review. In line with this, my Department ensures that detailed and robust procedures are in place to ensure that all relevant parties are fully aware of the requirements relating to applications for permission for foreign military aircraft to overfly or land in the State.

Brexit Negotiations

467. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and at European level regarding the need to ensure that there will be no return to the borders of the past following Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36784/17]

468. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions recently with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and at European Union level in terms of ensuring that cross-Border travel is fully maintained following Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36785/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 467 and 468 together.

Since taking up office, engagement on Brexit with EU partners has been a central element of my work. This approach has yielded clear results in ensuring that Ireland's unique issues and concerns have been fully understood by our EU27 partners and have been reflected in the EU's negotiating position. As the negotiations enter an important phase over the coming weeks and months, continuing such engagement with EU partners, both at political and official level, will remain a key priority.

On Monday 4 September, I met with Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Negotiator on Brexit, and his team, our second meeting since my appointment. During our discussion, I also thanked Mr. Barnier for pursuing Ireland's unique interests in the Brexit negotiations and for the high level of engagement that Ireland enjoys with his team. We agreed that, while good progress was made in the last round of negotiations on the Common Travel Area, more detailed work is required on protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the peace process, including in regard to North South cooperation and to avoiding a hard border, as well as other issues such as protecting the EU rights of Irish citizens in Northern Ireland. Overall, I welcomed the indications that EU and UK objectives on the Irish issues are converging but noted that the UK needs to back this up with tangible commitments that can pave the way for practical solutions. During the meeting, Mr Barnier confirmed that the Taskforce would publish a paper on "Guiding Principles for the Dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland", building on the European Council Guidelines agreed earlier this year.

Since my appointment, I have also held bilateral meetings with a number of my EU colleagues, including my Estonian, Luxembourg, French, Slovak, Belgian, and Spanish counterparts. I also welcomed the Finnish Foreign Minister to Ireland in July. Over the weekend I met with my counterparts from Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Slovenia at

the Gymnich/Informal Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council. In my meetings with EU partners to date, I have laid particular emphasis on Ireland's objective of protecting the gains of the peace process and avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. I have strongly emphasised the need for an imaginative and flexible political solution. In so doing, I have been equally clear that we will only pursue solutions that are compatible with our aim of protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Ireland's place in it. I will continue to deliver this message in my engagements in the coming weeks.

Separately, I met with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during his visit to Dublin on 22 August. While the focus of our discussions was on the best way forward for the Irish and British Governments to support the formation of a new Executive for Northern Ireland in the period ahead, I also discussed with the Secretary of State the Government's continuing concerns regarding the impact on Northern Ireland of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

I confirmed that the Government is analysing the published UK position papers on its exit from the Union, including the paper on Northern Ireland and Ireland, and together with the Commission Task Force and the other 26 EU Member States we are committed to working towards an orderly UK withdrawal. I underlined that protecting the peace process and maintaining the gains of the Good Friday Agreement is crucial and that this shared responsibility must be fully upheld in the negotiations between the European Union and the UK. I also noted that the immediate focus for the upcoming rounds of the EU-UK negotiations remains on advancing the issues identified for phase one, including the matters specific to the island of Ireland. In addition I emphasised that while the Government maintains regular contact with the British Government, the serious issues involved can only be substantively considered and addressed through the ongoing EU-UK negotiations.

EU Meetings

469. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues discussed at the recent Foreign Affairs Council meeting; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36786/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I attended the most recent EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on Monday 17 July. North Korea, Libya, the implementation of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy were on the agenda. Ministers discussed migration and the Central Mediterranean Route over a working lunch.

The continuing deterioration on the Korean peninsula is deeply worrying. The Council had an exchange of views on the situation and adopted conclusions. Ireland is fully supportive of the international sanctions regime against North Korea given its continued disregard for its international obligations.

My EU counterparts and I also had a discussion on Libya. High Representative Mogherini emphasized the need for a political solution. Ministers heard first-hand about some of the very difficult conditions facing migrants in Libya. I informed the Council of the Government's approval for the participation of the Defence Forces in EUNAVFOR Operation Sophia in the Central Mediterranean, an indication of Ireland's sincere commitment to the EU's continuing efforts to find a satisfactory solution to the migrant crisis.

The Council discussed the EU Global Strategy and priorities for the coming year. The strategy underpins the EU's contribution to international peace and security and I welcome particu-

larly the focus on EU support for global governance and multilateralism.

In the margins of the Council, I had bilateral meetings with my Belgian, Spanish and UK counterparts to discuss Ireland's priority issues in relation to Brexit, in particular with regard to Northern Ireland, the Common Travel Area, the economy and the future of the EU. I also had a bilateral meeting with the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, during which we discussed migration, EU-Africa relations and my recent visit to Israel and Palestine.

Ministerial Staff

470. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36954/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details of political appointments, ministerial drivers and staff seconded from another Government Department to work with Ministers in this Department in the years in question are provided in the following table:

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney TD			
Political Staff			
	Role	Remuneration	Period of employment
1	Special Advisor	PO Scale	30/06/2017 to date
2	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	03/07/2017 to date
3	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	03/07/2017 to date
			Seconded Staff
1	Constituency Office Staff	HEO Scale	15/06/2017 to date
2	Constituency Office Staff	EO Scale	15/06/2017 to date
Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development Ciarán Cannon TD			
Political Staff			Political Staff
	Role	Remuneration	Period of employment
1	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	10/07/2017 to date
2	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	03/07/2017 to date
			Seconded Staff
1	Private Secretary	HEO Scale and PS Allowance	11/08/2017 to date

Minister of State for European Affairs Helen McEntee TD			
Political Staff			
	Role	Remuneration	Period of employment
1	Special Adviser	AP Scale	Commencing 11/09/2017
2	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	22/06/2017 to date
3	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	22/06/2017 to date
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Charles Flanagan TD			
Political Staff			
	Role	Remuneration	Period of employment
1	Special Advisor	PO Scale	18/07/2014 – 29/06/2017
2	Special Advisor	PO Scale	11/07/2014 – 06/05/2016
	Special Advisor	PO Scale	27/05/2016 – 29/06/2017
3	Personal Secretary	Personal Secretary Scale	28/07/2014 – 24/05/2015
	Personal Secretary	Personal Secretary Scale	25/05/2015 – 06/05/2016
4	Personal Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale	25/05/2015 – 14/07/2016
	Personal Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale	18/07/2014 – 03/04/2015
5	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	28/07/2014 – 14/06/2017
6	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	21/07/2014 – 13/06/2016
	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	20/06/2016 – 14/06/2017
Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development Joe McHugh TD			
			Political Staff
1	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	16/05/2016 – 09/07/2017
2	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	16/05/2016 – 09/07/2017

Questions - Written Answers

Minister of State for European Affairs Dara Murphy TD			
Political Staff			
1	Special Advisor	AP Scale	06/10/2014 – 20/06/2017
2	Personal Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale	02/08/2014 – 08/05/2016
3	Personal Secretary	Personal Secretary Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
4	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	17/07/2014 – 07/06/2015
	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	08/05/2015 – 20/06/2017
5	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	17/07/2014 – 28/08/2015
	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	07/09/2015 – 20/06/2017
	Civilian Driver (Temporary)	Civilian Driver Scale	16/06/2016 – 30/09/2016
Minister of State for the Diaspora Jimmy Deenihan TD			
Political Staff			
1	Personal Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale	11/07/2014 -06/05/2016
2	Personal Secretary	Personal Secretary Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
3	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
4	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
Minister of State for International Development Seán Sherlock TD			
Political Staff			
1	Personal Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale	01/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
2	Personal Secretary	Personal Secretary Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
3	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016
4	Civilian Driver	Civilian Driver Scale	04/08/2014 – 06/05/2016

Passport Applications Fees

471. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the cost of applying for a passport is discouraging some persons from applying for same; his plans to reduce the cost of passport applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37059/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The cost of the standard ten year Irish passport compares favourably with many other jurisdictions. At a cost of €80, which breaks down to €8 per year, the Irish passport fee compares with approximately €9.60 per year for a French passport, €9.40 per year for a British passport, €9.90 per year for an American passport and €16.70 per year for an Australian passport.

Given that the shortfall in revenue would have to be met by the taxpayer, I do not have any plans at this time to reduce the fee for a passport.

Departmental Staff Data

472. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department in tabular form. [37072/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There were 1,524.9 full time equivalent staff employed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 30 June 2017.

	Male	Female
Full time equivalent staff	613.52	911.38

Departmental Staff Data

473. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of men and women, respectively, in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [37083/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in named grades and their equivalent grades particular to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 30 June 2017 is detailed in the following table broken down by gender:

Grade	FTEs	
	Men	Women
Secretary General	1	
Second Secretary General	4	1
Deputy Secretary General	2	1
Assistant Secretary	16	5
Principal Officer and equivalent grades including Counsellor and Principal Development Specialist	63	28.1

Assistant Principal Officer and equivalent grades including First Secretary, Development Specialist and Assistant Legal Adviser	125.8	124.4
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This Department has faced its own challenges in advancing gender equality and ensuring that women are represented fully in our senior management teams at home and abroad. My Management Board leads initiatives in this regard and a number of actions have been implemented which have seen great progress in the recent period, particularly at senior levels.

The Department has an active Management Board Gender Equality Sub-Committee, which feeds into Management Board deliberations. There is also a Gender Equality Action Plan Working Group, tasked with progressing the Gender Equality Action Plan, and an Equality and Diversity Working Group, tasked with addressing broader equality and diversity issues in the Department.

The work that we are doing, through the Gender Equality Action Plan, will be complemented by the wider work on gender being driven through the Civil Service Renewal Process.

We want our Missions abroad, and our senior management structures at home, to be representative of the people of Ireland and better gender balance will help us achieve one element of that ambition.

Passport Applications

474. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason a person that has changed their name by deed poll into Irish must wait for two years before being able to apply for their passport using the Irish version of the name; and if he will reconsider this practice to facilitate persons who wish to have their official papers in Irish to be able to do so in a shorter timeframe. [37104/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the terms of the Passports Act, 2008 (“the Act”), which provides a legal basis for the various policies and practices which are applied by the Passport Service in the issue of passports.

Section 10 of the Act broadly provides that a passport will issue in the name of a citizen as it appears on his/her birth certificate or naturalisation certificate. Issuance of a passport in a name other than that which appears on a person’s birth or naturalisation certificate is permitted under the Act in certain situations, such as after marriage and so on, provided the relevant civil or legal documents are available to verify this change of name.

In cases where name change arises other than by marriage, civil partnership or adoption, the Act specifically requires evidence of the use of this new name over a two year period.

However, if a person requests issuance of a passport with a name change consisting of the use of the Irish version of his/her name, the Passport Service may adopt some flexibility in this policy and may facilitate the request if the applicant provides proof of a minimum period of six months usage of the Irish version of their name. In such cases, the Passport Service will include an observation on the passport recording the person’s birth certificate or previous name. This observation must remain on the passport until the condition of two years proof of usage can be satisfied. After the required two years and if the person wishes to do so, he/she may

reapply (full fee will be required), submitting the required two years proof, and a new passport may issue without the observation.

This policy seeks to protect the integrity and security of the Irish passport and guard against passport or identity fraud, while at the same time facilitating those citizens who wish to use the Irish language more frequently in their daily lives.

Departmental Expenditure

475. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37225/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department comprises two separate votes, Vote 28 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Vote 27 International Co-operation.

The Department and our global mission network engage a range services with banks domestically and internationally.

The following table shows the cost incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees:

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade banking charges and card fees 2012 to 2016.

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
€193,971	€180,827	€189,202	€169,350	€238,290

The Department holds bank accounts with a wide range of financial institutions internationally.

Domestically the main financial institutions that the Department has bank accounts with are AIB, Bank of Ireland and Citibank.

Israeli Settlements

476. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department will convey its concerns to the Israeli authorities regarding the disturbing increase in the demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied Palestinian territory over the past 12 months, with over 62 homes being demolished in east Jerusalem displacing over 115 persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37498/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The continuing and increasing instance of demolitions by Israel of Palestinian homes, along with other related policies designed to push Palestinians off the land that they inhabit, has been a central focus of Ireland's engagement on the Israel/Palestine conflict for some years. We raise these concerns with the Israeli authorities at every suitable opportunity, and I did so myself during my visit to Israel and Palestine in July. It goes without saying that the response to date has been unsatisfactory and insufficient. Ireland also raises these policies in discussions at EU and UN level, and argues for stronger responses to this continuing sustained breach of international law. We also work with and support Israeli and Palestinian NGOs which combat these policies.

We will continue to do so.

Subsidiary Protection

477. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to the conclusions of the legal proceedings surrounding subsidiary protection residence if a decision has been reached on the legal status of a person (details supplied) of a child born here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37582/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, the legal status of any non-national in the State is a matter for the Irish immigration authorities which comes under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality. Clarification is being sought from the Department of Justice and Equality on the person's entitlement to Irish citizenship and specifically on whether residence under Subsidiary Protection could be reckoned for the purposes of Section 6A of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act (as amended) and how such residence should be calculated.

The Passport Service remains in close contact with the Department of Justice and Equality and the Office of the Attorney General for a final position on the matter.

Departmental Funding

478. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the investment made by his Department in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37645/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department administers a number of funding programmes, including Ireland's official overseas development programme, Irish Aid. As part of Irish Aid, funding is provided through the annual Development Education Grants Scheme for projects aimed at promoting awareness of and engagement with global development and justice issues. Information on Development Education grants is available on the Irish Aid website www.irishaid.ie.

Since it was established in 1982, the Reconciliation Fund has been supporting NGOs, community groups, and voluntary organisations to support reconciliation and to create better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. The Fund has an annual budget of €2.7 million with which it supports such projects. Communities from across both Northern Ireland and the border region have in particular been beneficiaries of the Fund. The projects listed below which were awarded grants by the Fund in 2016 have promoted reconciliation by bringing people together on a cross-community and cross-border basis around activities focusing on sports, commemoration, and youth.

My Department's Emigrant Support Programme supports Irish communities overseas by funding non-profit organisations and projects. From time to time funding is granted to an organisation based in Ireland for projects overseas to foster more strategic links with the global Irish and to support frontline welfare services that help the most vulnerable members of our overseas communities.

The table lists funding provided to projects in the Cavan, Monaghan and Meath area through the Development Education Grants Scheme, the Reconciliation Fund and the Emigrant Support Fund from March 2016 to date. The table also provides details of nationwide programmes, for

which a county-by-county breakdown is not available.

Name	Project Title	Location	Amount in 2016	Amount in 2017
Amnesty	The Right Sparks Project: A CPD Programme in development education for primary school teachers	Nationwide	€40,000	-
An Taisce	Green Schools - Global Citizenship	Nationwide	€40,000	€48,000
Development Perspectives	Insight: Development Education accredited programme for adults.	Edition 1 - Louth, Meath, Cavan and Monaghan	€40,000	-
Development Perspectives	SDG Challenge	Nationwide	-	€50,000
Eco-Unesco	Youth for Sustainable Development; Global Youth Leaders for Change	Dublin, Meath, Louth, Galway	-	€95,000
NYCI	2030 Vision: New Goals. New Approach	Nationwide	€85,000	€95,000
Tearfund	Church of Ireland Youth Leader Development Education Training Year 2	Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough, Dundalk and Drogheda	€10,000	-
Tearfund	Church of Ireland Youth Leader Development Education Training Year 3	Diocese of Cork, Cloyne, Ross and Meath.	-	13,810
Poetry Ireland	Professional Development for Primary-School Teachers in Arts-Based Approaches to Development Education	Dublin and Navan, Co. Meath	-	€10,550
Clogher 2016 Historical Commemoration Committee	1916-2016 Cross-Border Centenary Commemorations Programme.	Fermanagh and Monaghan	€5,000	
Knockconan-Aughnacloy Cross Border Summer Camp	Cross-Border Summer Camp	Monaghan and Tyrone	€3,000	-

Name	Project Title	Location	Amount in 2016	Amount in 2017
Old School Boxing Club	Boxing for Peace Cross-Border Project	Derry and Monaghan	€8,000	-
Glór na nGael	Irish language projects abroad	Meath	€35,000	€35,000(awaiting approval)

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

479. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has raised with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the British Foreign Secretary the need for the British Government to respond positively to the unanimous requests from Dáil Éireann to provide access to papers dealing with the Dublin-Monaghan bombing of 1974; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37646/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Dealing with outstanding issues relating to the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland are of the utmost importance to me as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and for the Government. The Programme for a Partnership Government highlights this priority, with specific reference to implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin Monaghan bombings.

The 17 May marked the 43rd anniversary of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, which saw the biggest loss of life in a single day during the Troubles. My predecessor Minister Flanagan participated on behalf of the Government in the commemoration ceremony that day and in addressing the commemoration ceremony, he reaffirmed the Government's determination to continue – and to complete – our efforts to seek the truth of those awful events of 17 May 1974.

The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings that was adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow.

The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government.

I have raised the matter with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and advised him that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin Monaghan atrocities. I have also underlined to the Secretary of State that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and emphasised the urgent need for a response from the British Government.

The Government will continue to pursue this matter with the British Government, urging them to provide a satisfactory response to the motions that have been adopted by Dáil Éireann. I will remain actively engaged on an ongoing basis on this matter, as will my officials.

Passport Applications Data

480. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of new passports that have been issued in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37647/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passports issued in each of the years requested is as follows:

2014	632,156
2015	672,760
2016	733,060
2017 (1 January to 5 September)	615,971

Middle East Issues

481. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views regarding the revocation by Israel of Bedouins' Israeli citizenship in large numbers over recent months (details supplied) with no warning or explanation; and the steps he will take to raise this matter with the Israeli authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37752/17]

484. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent revoking of citizenship of hundreds of Negev Bedouin by Israel; the measures he will take in view of the fact that these persons are now stateless; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37795/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 481 and 484 together.

I am aware of the issue in question, which, if confirmed, would indeed be a matter of serious concern. There has been some media reporting on this, but not all of the details are yet clear. I am aware that the Knesset has been paying attention to the issue, and that Israeli authorities have stated that recent decisions represent a correction of previous bureaucratic omissions, that an accelerated process is being established to correct this, and that no-one will lose their status as a result. We will see if these assurances are borne out, and I have asked the Embassy of Ireland in Tel Aviv to keep me informed.

Public Services Card

482. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the purpose the public services card plays in identifying a person that is renewing a passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37762/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service currently requires a photocopy of the Public Services card ("PSC") for first time adult applicants and for applicants seeking to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports that were issued prior to 2005. This measure has been an important step in protecting against fraud and identity theft and in upholding the integrity of the Irish passport.

The Government decided on 17 July that the PSC would be required for all passport applications made in the State by the end of 2018.

The PSC and the relevant issuing process, which is managed by the Department of Social Protection, is secure and robust and gives a high degree of assurance regarding the identity of

the holder.

My Department will ensure that any changes to the passport application process are communicated to the public well in advance and will work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Social Protection on the practicalities involved.

Departmental Staff Data

483. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number and grade of all staff in his Department; the number and grade of vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37779/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There were 1,524.9 full time equivalent staff employed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 30 June 2017. These staff are detailed by grade in the following table:

Grade	
Secretary General	1
Second Secretary General	5
Deputy Secretary	3
Assistant Secretary	21
Counsellor	67.6
Principal	18.6
Principal Development Specialist	4.9
Senior Development Specialist	14
Assistant Legal Adviser	8
First Secretary	128
Assistant Principal	45.8
Assistant Principal Add ons	25
Professional Accountant	6
Development Specialist	23.4
Architect	1
Third Secretary	103
Administrative Officer	4
Higher Executive Officer	82.4
Executive Officer	128.93
Clerical Officer	433.1
Civilian Driver	4
Cleaners	11
Services Officer	29
Nightwatchman	2
Political Appointees	3
Local staff	352.17
Total	1524.9

When there is a specific business need, my Department employs temporary short term staff to address those requirements.

Staffing within the Department is subject to a payroll, as opposed to a staffing numbers, ceiling and the Department's Management Board decide on the allocation of human resources to deliver on the Department's priorities within that payroll ceiling. Therefore it is not possible to provide the Deputy with a current number and grade of vacancies in the Department. However, I can advise the Deputy that the Department is actively filling roles at most grades in the Department and we are currently working with our colleagues in the Public Appointments Service on two competitions specific to this Department for Third Secretary and Counsellor grades.

Question No. 484 answered with Question No. 481.

North-South Implementation Bodies

485. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of funding for the Centre for Cross Border Studies; the funding it has received in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37813/17]

486. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that funding from the Northern Executive for the Centre for Cross Border Studies has been halted due to the lack of a functioning Executive; if he has been in contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding same; his plans to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37814/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 485 and 486 together.

I am very familiar with the work of the Centre for Cross Border Studies which has an excellent track record for encouraging the development of North-South co-operation. I am very pleased that my Department, through our Reconciliation Fund, has provided over €230,000 to the Centre since 2001.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies is currently being funded for a project to develop their existing "Border People" website which provides citizens in both Ireland and Northern Ireland with practical information regarding cross-border mobility issues as well as the likely implications of Brexit on the border region.

Cross border work such as this is crucial for the border economy and for the island as a whole to benefit from the gains of the peace process. Building and maintaining relationships, and working in a spirit of co-operation, North and South, is also key to mitigating the negative impacts of Brexit for our people, and the Centre for Cross Border Studies is also playing an important role in that work.

I have recently received correspondence from the Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh about the funding of the Centre and this is currently under consideration in my Department. I have not discussed this specific matter with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Year	Amount	Project Title
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2014	€10,000	“The Sir George Quigley Memorial Project: Prospects for the All-Island Economy 2020 and Beyond”
2015	€50,000	“Border People Project”
2015	€10,000	“2016 Annual CCBS Conference: Bordering Between Unions – What Does the UK Referendum on Europe Mean for Us?”
2017	€8,400	“Border People Project”

Detailed lists of the Reconciliation Fund grants awarded are available on the Department’s website www.dfa.ie/about-us/funding/reconciliation-fund/.

Ministerial Meetings

487. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting in August 2017 with Secretary of State Brokenshire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37815/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I met with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 22 August in Dublin to discuss the best way forward for the Irish and British Governments to support the formation of a new Executive for Northern Ireland in the period ahead, consistent with our responsibilities as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement.

In our discussion we reaffirmed both Governments’ determination to see the devolved institutions of the Good Friday Agreement up and running again as soon as possible. We noted that in the first instance it is the parties who have the enabling electoral mandates that need to reach the necessary agreement to form a new Executive. The Secretary of State and I agreed that both Governments would continue to encourage and do all that we could in the weeks ahead to support the parties in achieving that essential objective.

I also discussed with the Secretary of State the Government’s continuing concerns regarding the impact on Northern Ireland of the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union. We noted that the issues for Northern Ireland can only be addressed through the ongoing EU-UK negotiations.

I confirmed that the Government, along with our EU partners, is analysing the published UK position papers on its exit from the Union, including the paper on Northern Ireland and Ireland, and together with the Commission Task Force and the other 26 EU Member States, we are committed to working towards an orderly UK withdrawal.

I underlined that protecting the peace process and maintaining the gains of the Good Friday Agreement is crucial and that this shared responsibility must be fully upheld in the negotiations between the European Union and the UK.

I remain in regular contact with the SOSNI in relation to the political situation in Northern Ireland.

Foreign Conflicts

488. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the measures the Government plans to take in defence of the rights of the Rohingya people in Myanmar in view of recent reports (details supplied) of 18,500 persons fleeing to Bangladesh and the widespread burning of Rohingya villages; his views on whether this amounts to ethnic cleansing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37910/17]

491. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent events in Myanmar; the efforts being made by the European Union and the international community to protect the Rohingya; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37979/17]

545. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts he is making to encourage the international community to challenge the government of Myanmar and if necessary to take action against it in respect of the ongoing genocide of the Rohingya people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38987/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 488, 491 and 545 together.

I am very concerned by the recent escalation of violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar/Burma, and the plight of the Rohingya people. I condemn the attacks on 25 August by militants and the subsequent violence which has taken place. I am also deeply concerned by the reports of excesses during the security operations conducted by Myanmar's security forces, leading to a massive flow of refugees, and call on security forces to exercise restraint and to protect civilians.

It is also critical that access to humanitarian aid and media personnel is fully restored in this region. It is also important that an impartial, independent investigation into recent events in Rakhine State should be carried out. Ireland supported the inclusion of a reference to the establishment of a UN fact-finding mission in the last resolution on Myanmar/Burma at the UN Human Rights Council; such an investigation will help to ascertain the facts on the ground.

This Government is actively raising its concerns both through our bilateral contacts with the Government of Myanmar and via participation in the EU and UN. Ireland's Embassy in Bangkok, which is accredited to Myanmar/Burma, is monitoring the situation closely. The Ambassador raised our concerns with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs U Kyaw Tin during a visit to the country in January.

Ireland has also provided development assistance and humanitarian aid to address the needs of people in Rakhine State, including the Rohingya community. Ireland has provided a total of just over €2.7 million in humanitarian assistance to Myanmar since 2012. Our humanitarian response has been channeled through trusted NGO partners, including Trócaire and Plan International Ireland. Ireland continues to monitor this protracted humanitarian situation closely and may allocate additional humanitarian assistance in the coming months, in line with humanitarian needs.

The EU is also working to find a solution both in its bilateral contacts with Myanmar/Burma such as the EU-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue and via its participation in international fora, including the Human Rights Council, where it has continued to present a resolution on Myanmar/Burma, renewing the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur by another year. Last week High Representative Federica Mogherini issued a statement on the situation, noting that the EU stands in solidarity with the Bangladeshi authorities, who have played a crucial humanitarian

role in welcoming the refugees who have arrived as a result of the crisis.

The UN has also been active, particularly the office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, despite the limited access it has been afforded to the conflict region by the Myanmar Government.

Ireland, the EU and the UN all welcome the recommendations of the recently-published final report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. We urge the Government of Myanmar to begin implementing these recommendations as soon as possible. Addressing the underlying causes, including the elimination of discrimination and statelessness, forms a critical basis for lasting peace and socio-economic development for all the communities of Rakhine State.

We also support the democratic transition which is currently underway in Myanmar/Burma following elections in November 2015. We recognise the positive steps that the new Government of Myanmar/Burma has taken in pursuit of peace and reconciliation, democratic reforms and economic growth.

Consular Services Provision

489. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the supports his Department provides to Irish citizens with children holding Irish citizenship who are involved in custody battles involving ex partners in other jurisdictions within the EU and outside the EU; and his plans to improve these support services. [37931/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department and our Embassy network is available to provide consular assistance to all Irish citizens. I attach particular importance to the protection of children and their welfare.

Child custody disputes are difficult and distressing, and are often more difficult if there is an international or cross-border dimension, and my Department is regularly contacted and asked to assist in such cases. Because of the complex legal issues often involved in such cases, my Department's role is usually quite constrained and limited. When contacted in such cases, my officials can, for example, discuss the issues involved with the Irish parent and the relevant Irish Embassy and seek to establish what mediation services or options are available locally. They can also provide lists of English-speaking lawyers and lawyers with expertise in relevant areas of family law in the country where the child or children are located. They can, on request, seek to facilitate a welfare check on the child or children concerned through the local authorities.

In cases where parental child abduction is alleged to have occurred, the nature of the support that can be offered depends on whether or not the country to which the child or children have been taken is a party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. In a case where the child or children are located in a country which is a party to the Hague Convention, then that case would be handled within the framework provided by that Convention, with a clear role for the Central Authority for Child Abduction, which falls under the remit of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Parents in cases where a child or children are suspected of having been unlawfully abducted to a country which is not a signatory to the Hague Convention have recourse to the criminal justice system and should report the matter to An Garda Síochána. They may also wish to consider or seek legal advice on pursuing legal proceedings in Ireland and/or the jurisdiction to which the child or children have been taken to seek to have them returned. They are also, of course, entitled to seek information or consular assistance from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and my Department can assist in the ways outlined earlier.

My Department cannot provide legal advice or financial assistance towards legal advice or representation, and this is always made very clear including in my Department's Consular Assistance Charter and on its Website.

Foreign Policy

490. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to recognise the deaths of a very large number of Armenian persons in 1915 as genocide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37972/17]

502. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a proposal for Dáil Éireann to recognise the Armenian genocide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38155/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 490 and 502 together.

The Irish Government has expressed its deepest sympathy for the enormous suffering of the Armenian people during the terrible events of 1915 which resulted in the tragic deaths of very large numbers of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire.

No Irish Government has taken a position on the recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide, believing that it is not in a position to adjudicate on this contentious matter, involving the consideration of a number of legal issues and an assessment of the actions and intentions of many parties during that time. It is Ireland's general practice to recognise genocide only where this has been established by a judgment of an international court or where there is international consensus on the matter.

A Notice of Motion on this issue was received on 31 August 2017.

Question No. 491 answered with Question No. 488.

Brexit Staff

492. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37993/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Additional capabilities and resources have been assigned across my Department to address issues arising from the complex process of the UK exit from the EU. At Headquarters the key Divisions are the European Union (EU) Division and the Ireland, UK and Americas (IUKA) Division. The EU Division is headed at Second Secretary General level and IUKA Division is headed at Assistant Secretary General level. Both divisions have been assigned additional resources.

The European Union Division has a dedicated team focused exclusively on the EU-UK negotiations, led by a senior officer at Counsellor level. Within the IUKA Division, there is a Brexit-specific policy co-ordination function in place and there are teams focused on Northern Ireland and on wider British-Irish Relations; their duties include Brexit-related issues.

There is also an intra-Departmental senior management group focusing on issues relating

to the UK exit, chaired by the Secretary General and comprising senior officials from across all relevant business units of the Department.

To support the complex and intensive negotiation process, my Department received an additional €3.2 million as part of the 2017 allocation. This facilitated the transfer back to my Department from the Department of the Taoiseach of 14 staff to a new, enlarged, European Union Division.

The Department has also allocated an additional budget of €2 million. This budget will be used to increase the number of staff assigned to the management and support of the negotiations and to increase the level of support provided to our colleagues across all Government Departments and agencies.

The measures my Department put in place to manage the initial phase of our response to the UK decision to leave the EU remain under review. The Department will allocate additional staff resources as deemed necessary to further augment our level of support across Government and across our network.

Brexit Staff

493. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38009/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Managing our response to Brexit has impacted on the work of many staff at Headquarters and a significant number of those overseas. Additional staff have been assigned to the key Divisions with responsibility for Brexit matters, the European Union Division and the Ireland, UK and Americas (IUKA) Division, to cover the issues arising from the UK exit process.

The European Union Division has a dedicated team focused on the EU-UK negotiations, led by a senior officer at Counsellor level. Within the IUKA Division, there is a Brexit-specific policy co-ordination function in place and there are teams focused on Northern Ireland and on wider British-Irish Relations; their duties include Brexit related issues.

For operational and service oriented units like the Passport Office and Consular service, there has been a marked increase in demand for passports and citizenship via foreign birth registration from applicants in Northern Ireland and in Britain. We have responded by recruiting over 230 temporary and fulltime clerical officers assigned to our Dublin, Cork and London operations.

Many business units of my Department at headquarters in Dublin are involved in some way as part of the response to the UK exit, for example, the Legal Division, the Trade Division and the Policy Planning Unit.

There is also an intra-Departmental senior management group focusing on issues relating to the UK exit, chaired by the Secretary General and comprising senior officials from across all relevant business units of the Department.

Overseas, additional posts dedicated to issues relating to the UK exit have been assigned to our Embassies in London, Berlin, and Paris as well as the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union in Brussels, which has a unit dedicated to managing our response to this issue.

It is important to emphasise that our approach has not been merely to recruit or assign additional staff, but rather also to prioritise Brexit in the work of our entire network. The Department may require additional staff resources if it is deemed necessary to further augment our level of support across Government and across our network.

Construction Costs

494. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to tackle this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38025/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Office of Public Works provides my Department with office accommodation for its offices in Ireland. They also provide a shared service for the maintenance of these buildings and management of construction projects on the Department's behalf.

In the case of our offices abroad, the Department undertakes construction projects to maintain those properties which the State owns and, in the case of leased properties, carries out necessary maintenance to ensure lease requirements are adhered to.

These projects would be smaller, short term and in conjunction with national procurement guidelines, openly tendered in the local market for the work as required. As the cost of construction is at the current market rate the impact of construction inflation is not materially significant. Most construction projects overseas are on a fixed cost basis and cost control is a major element of project management.

Northern Ireland

495. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the Stormont talks to restore power sharing in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38086/17]

504. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of recent efforts to restart the power sharing Executive in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38347/17]

539. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his visit to Stormont on 5 September 2017; the meetings he attended; the issues that were discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38952/17]

541. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on the most recent attempts to reinstate the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38954/17]

543. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when formal talks will resume on reinstating the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38956/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 495, 504, 539, 541 and 543 together.

The Government is determined, as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to do everything that we can to see all of its institutions operating effectively, including the devolved Assembly and power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland.

I met with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in Dublin on 22 August to discuss the best way forward for the Irish and British Governments to support the formation of a new Executive in the period ahead. I remain in regular contact with Secretary of State Brokenshire, to identify where and how we can continue to support and encourage the parties in achieving that essential objective.

In the first instance, it is the parties who have the enabling electoral mandates that need to reach the necessary agreement to form a new Executive. I visited Belfast on 5 September to discuss with each of the political parties the prospects and the process for achieving that. I was encouraged that all of the parties want to see devolution working and they are all agreed that locally accountable power-sharing government is in the best interests of Northern Ireland. The parties have also had various bilateral contacts and this continued engagement is important to acknowledge.

In this regard, I welcome the statements made on 6 September by the DUP leader, Arlene Foster, and by Sinn Féin's leader in the Assembly, Michelle O'Neill, referring to the recent intensified engagement between both parties and their intention to continue their discussions and with the other parties, with a view to reaching an agreement on a new Executive.

I believe that all parties are conscious that time cannot be unlimited in seeking this outcome and that Northern Ireland has been without an Executive for several months, including the period when the Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK are focussed on the unique issues relating to the island of Ireland.

There remain challenges and differences between the parties on specific issues, but I do not believe that these are insurmountable. I will continue to work with the Secretary of State and each of the political parties in Northern Ireland to support an agreement on the formation of a new power-sharing Executive for Northern Ireland within the mandate of the current Assembly.

Foreign Conflicts

496. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the advice and actions his Department has taken in respect of the military stand off in Bhutan between the People's Republic of China and India; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38095/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of recent developments involving the People's Republic of China and India in Bhutan. The Irish Embassies in New Delhi and Beijing have monitored the situation closely, which has now deescalated.

It is our strong wish to see such disputes resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law, and we urge the parties involved to refrain from actions that could lead to increased tensions in the region.

Foreign Policy

497. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action his Department has taken in respect of the tensions in the Korean peninsula and the threat to civilians in Japan posed by ongoing North Korean missile tests; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [38096/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am deeply worried by the deterioration of the situation on the Korean peninsula. North Korea's recent actions have raised tensions and present a real threat to peace and security in the entire North East Asia region and beyond. I have expressed my condemnation of these actions in recent statements, including after North Korea's ballistic missile test which flew over Japanese territory on 29 August 2017, and most recently following North Korea's sixth nuclear test conducted on 3 September 2017.

These actions are an unacceptable and provocative violation of North Korea's international obligations not to conduct such tests and I have unreservedly condemned such actions. I have called on North Korea to abandon its programmes to develop ballistic missiles, nuclear capabilities and weapons of mass destruction in a manner that is complete, verifiable and irreversible.

The latest nuclear test highlights the need for immediate entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). I have urged all states who have not already done so to ratify the Treaty without delay so that the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture can be strengthened and the global norm against testing reinforced.

Urgent engagement on nuclear disarmament by all stakeholders is now needed. I have called on the North Korean authorities to cease all nuclear testing and re-engage with the Six Party Talks on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, immediately and without pre-conditions.

Ireland strongly supports the international sanctions regime against North Korea, and has called for greater emphasis to be placed on effective implementation of the sanctions regime. New sanctions against North Korea, including additional EU autonomous restrictive measures, should not be ruled out.

Ministerial Meetings

498. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the meeting with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce on 29 August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38097/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As part of my ongoing engagement with stakeholders across the island of Ireland, I spoke at a breakfast briefing for the members of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday, 29 August 2017, in Belfast. The event was attended by over 60 representatives of businesses from all across Northern Ireland, many of whom have cross-border operations.

The event was an important opportunity for me to hear the key concerns in the context of Brexit from businesses operating in Northern Ireland and to inform and update them on developments in the Brexit negotiations and the efforts being made by the Government to protect the hard-won peace and prosperity that is underpinned by the all-island economy made possible through the Good Friday Agreement and the Peace Process.

I strongly encouraged the business representatives present to use the window of opportunity of this current phase of negotiations, while the focus is on the issues unique to the island of Ireland, to ensure their voices are heard.

I reiterated the Government's position that the current border arrangement has been a vital

part of our shared peace and prosperity and the Government's conviction that the best way to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland is for the UK to remain in the Customs Union and Single Market.

My remarks delivered at the breakfast briefing are available publicly at www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/speeches/speeches-archive/2017/august/minister-coveney-remarks-to-ni-chamber-of-commerce/.

Brexit Issues

499. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the work his Department has undertaken in engaging with and studying the policy positions of business and political groupings in Britain advocating that the United Kingdom remain in the customs union and Single Market, including the British Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38098/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Officials of my Department are engaged in this work on an ongoing and continuing basis. This work covers the broad spectrum of political and policy positions on all matters relating to Brexit across the UK, including those articulated in Westminster debates, committee hearings and through the media.

Our Embassy in London and our Consulate in Edinburgh report on policy developments and commentary on a regular basis from across the UK.

My Department, through the responsible officials in Dublin and in the Embassy in London, is in regular contact with business representatives, including the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. I met with representatives of the Chamber myself during my visit to London in July.

I, my Government colleagues, and officials across Government continue to be actively engaging with stakeholders across the island of Ireland to hear their concerns and perspectives, including through the All-Island Civic Dialogue. Most recently I met with members of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce in Belfast and with Irish MEPs in Brussels.

Our Embassies across the EU Member States also actively report on developments of note in the context of Brexit in their countries of accreditation.

Consular Services Provision

500. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he has taken to help the family of a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that Egypt is not party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38099/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person referred to by the Deputy was first brought to the attention of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2009, and officials from the Consular Assistance Section in Dublin and from our Embassy in Cairo have provided extensive consular assistance to the family since then. Cases of this nature are very difficult and complex and are complicated by the fact that Egypt is not a party to the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction.

This case has consistently been raised with the Egyptian authorities at the highest levels through Ministerial and diplomatic channels on a number of occasions since 2009. I wish to

assure the Deputy that my Department and the Embassy of Ireland in Cairo stands ready to provide any possible further consular assistance that they can to this family concerned.

Officials from my Department's Consular Directorate are available to meet with the family at any time, and this was confirmed to them in recent correspondence.

Public Services Card

501. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he, or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department, plans to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38149/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service currently requires a photocopy of the Public Services card ("PSC") for first time adult applicants and for applicants seeking to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports that were issued prior to 2005. This measure has been an important step in protecting against fraud and identity theft and in upholding the integrity of the Irish passport.

The Government decided on 17 July that the PSC would be required for all passport applications made in the State by the end of 2018.

This requirement is being introduced due to the robust assurances provided by the SAFE 2 standard in protecting against fraud and identity theft. The SAFE 2 process, which includes the Public Services Card and MyGovID, represents the most secure and robust means available to the State for physically or digitally verifying applicants for public services. This measure will therefore assist in upholding the integrity of the Irish passport.

My Department will ensure that any changes to the passport application process are communicated to the public well in advance and will work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Social Protection on the practicalities involved.

Question No. 502 answered with Question No. 490.

Brexit Negotiations

503. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the progress made to date in 2017 in the Brexit negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38346/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There have been three rounds of negotiations to date, with the most recent round concluding on 31 August. As this is the first phase of negotiations, and in line with the agreed sequencing of negotiations, the focus has been on the withdrawal issues of citizens' rights, the financial settlement, other separation issues and the unique Irish issues. Both the EU and UK have used these early rounds of negotiations to clarify their respective positions, highlighting the areas of agreement and divergence.

Discussions on most of the issues have been constructive to date, with some progress being made in the areas of citizens' rights and the other separation issues. However, it is clear that many difficult and complex issues remain, above all in regard to the financial settlement. It is the area in which the least amount of progress has been made. Although the UK has accepted

that it will have financial obligations to honour on its departure, it has not yet advanced a more concrete position on the issue.

It is imperative that sufficient progress is made on this issue, as well as on all of the other withdrawal issues, in order for the European Council to be able make a decision regarding the opening of parallel discussions on the framework for future relations. It will be in the second phase that trade and sectoral issues, including the question of transitional arrangements, will be discussed. Given that these issues are of crucial importance to Ireland and our economy, the Government wants to see phase two to begin as soon as possible. However, unless the UK demonstrates greater and more constructive engagement on these issues in the next two rounds of negotiations, it is unlikely that the European Council on 19-20 October will be in a position to decide on whether sufficient progress has been achieved in the first phase of the negotiations.

Michel Barnier, EU Chief Negotiator, and his Taskforce are well prepared for these negotiations, based both on the European Council guidelines and the more detailed negotiating directives agreed in the spring and the extensive and ongoing consultations they are holding with all Member States. I am appreciative of the level of support that both the Taskforce and our EU partners have shown for Ireland's unique concerns, with Mr Barnier reiterating after our meeting last week that Ireland's interests are the EU's interests. My officials and I have been working very closely with Mr Barnier and his team to ensure that Ireland's positions are fully reflected in the negotiations and we will continue to engage closely with them in the weeks and months ahead.

On the Irish specific issues, I am satisfied with the direction the High Level Dialogue between the UK and EU teams is taking. Good progress has been made on the Common Travel Area and there is a common objective to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process. However, while some progress is being made on the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process, including the avoidance of a hard border, a lot more work is required on ensuring that the full implications of the UK's decision to leave the EU is understood, including on North South cooperation. In the last round of negotiations which concluded on 31 August, the UK presented its paper on Ireland and Northern Ireland. While the publication of this paper is welcome, the UK's aspirations and statements of principle need to be backed by substantive commitments and clear links to workable solutions by the UK.

The Government welcomes and supports the Taskforce's own paper on the "*Guiding Principles for the dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland*" on 7 September. The paper builds on the European Council Guidelines agreed earlier this year and reflects the priority Irish issues identified by the Government: protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and the peace process, including avoiding a hard border, and maintaining the Common Travel Area and sets out the principles on which solutions will have to be based. The EU will now seek to agree these principles with the UK as the basis for the future discussions on detailed solutions. I and my officials will continue to work closely with Mr Barnier and his team to advance Ireland's concerns in these negotiations.

Question No. 504 answered with Question No. 495.

Election Monitoring Missions

505. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Kenya in view of the fact that the August 2017 election results have been annulled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38348/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I wish to commend the people of Kenya who on 8 August turned out in great numbers to vote in their presidential, parliamentary and county level elections. On 11 August, the incumbent, Uhuru Kenyatta of the Jubilee coalition, was declared winner of the Presidential election, defeating Raila Odinga, leader of the National Super Alliance (NASA) opposition coalition, and other candidates.

Two Irish observers participated as election observers through the EU Election Observation Mission. The general consensus of international observers was that while the elections were a broadly positive exercise in democracy there were a number of shortcomings in the electoral process, including with the implementation of election technology.

The outcome of the election was subsequently disputed by the opposition. Some sporadic violence occurred, resulting in the deaths of a reported 24 people. The decision of the opposition to bring a petition to the Kenyan Supreme Court calmed the situation. On 1 September, the Supreme Court declared the Presidential result invalid, citing issues with the conduct of the election, and called for a fresh Presidential election. That new election is scheduled to be held on 17 October.

Ireland acknowledges the work of the Supreme Court in analysing the electoral process. The judgment underlines the institutional strength and independence of the Supreme Court and the robust nature of Kenyan democracy. The full judgment will be published in the coming weeks.

The EU has called on political leaders in the country to use their authority to promote peace and calm on all sides, and to ensure adherence to the fundamental democratic principles of transparency and rule of law. The EU Election Observation Mission will stay in the country until the completion of the electoral process.

Kenya is an important partner of Ireland in Africa, with whom we have strong trade, development and cultural links. Together with our EU partners, we will continue to promote a transparent, credible, inclusive and peaceful election re-run in the country and will continue to actively monitor developments in the lead up to the re-run of the election, including through the work of the Embassy of Ireland in Nairobi.

Visa Agreements

506. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on reports that the United States graduate visa programme may be discontinued; the number of graduates currently availing of the visa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38349/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The J1 programme has been a tremendously successful part of the Irish-US bilateral relationship for almost 50 years, with 150,000 Irish third level students and young people having participated in the programme over that time.

The J1 programme offers a suite of more than a dozen options for participants wishing to experience life in the US while providing opportunities to work while doing so, one of which options is the graduate visa programme.

The Irish Government does not have a role in administering the J1 programme, which is a programme of the US Department of State run by a number of not-for-profit US sponsoring

bodies, who, in turn, work with agencies here in Ireland.

Nevertheless, officials at the Embassy of Ireland in Washington DC are in regular contact with the US State Department regarding the J1 programme, while officials from my Department are also in regular contact with the US Embassy in Dublin.

I am aware of media reports that the J1 programmes are being reviewed by the US administration, in the context of President Trump's "Hire American" Executive Order.

In the year ended 30 September 2015, more than 8,000 J1 visas were issued to Irish citizens in various categories.

The J1 programme remains, therefore, an important component of our bilateral relationship with the United States.

Any cuts to the programme would be of serious concern and my officials in Washington and Dublin have made our position clear to the US Administration.

I can assure the Deputy of the Government's commitment to the continued success of all the J1 programmes.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

507. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of recent efforts to resolve the situation of the undocumented Irish in the United States; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38350/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's objectives regarding undocumented Irish citizens in the United States remain constant, namely, to achieve relief for the undocumented and facilitate greater pathways for legal migration to the United States.

In pursuit of these objectives, Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the U.S. systematically avail of all opportunities to raise immigration, including the prospects for immigration reform and the situation of the undocumented Irish, with representatives of the Administration and Congressional members.

Last March the then Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, TD, used the opportunity of the Speaker's Lunch, as well as his meetings with President Trump, Vice-President Pence, Speaker Ryan and other senior US leaders during the St. Patrick's Day engagements in Washington DC, to raise immigration-related issues and to convey the continuing importance which we attach to them.

Subsequently, Taoiseach Varadkar spoke by phone with President Trump on the afternoon of Tuesday 27 June. During their conversation, the Taoiseach raised a number of issues, including the situation of the undocumented Irish in the US. The Taoiseach looks forward to having an opportunity to discuss this important issue with President Trump in more detail in due course.

The Government's commitment to supporting the undocumented and engaging with the US administration on the issue has recently been reinforced by the appointment by the Taoiseach of Deputy John Deasy as Special Envoy to the United States Congress to work for the undocumented Irish.

Since being appointed as Special Envoy, Deputy Deasy has engaged with key congressional and senate members on both sides of the aisle, as well as with representatives of the Admin-

istration. Working closely with the Embassy and with the Consulates, Deputy Deasy visited Washington and New York from 23-to-28 July last and, just last week, he was in the US again for another series of meetings and consultations. Deputy Deasy has also visited a number of Irish immigration advice centres during these visits.

I am acutely aware of the very understandable concerns which exist among members of the Irish community in the US in light of recent developments in the immigration field under the new US Administration.

With this in mind, my Department has, through the Irish Embassy in Washington DC, obtained legal advice on the implications of those developments for undocumented Irish citizens in the US. This advice has been disseminated amongst Irish immigration centres in the United States and is available online.

The issues of immigration reform and the welfare of undocumented Irish citizens in the US are a central plank of the work of Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the US. The Embassy in Washington DC and our six Consulates across the US continue to work with Irish immigration centres to provide support to undocumented Irish citizens.

I can assure the Deputy of the Government's continued commitment to pursuing these matters on behalf of our affected citizens in the U.S.

Irish Prisoners Abroad

508. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the next steps that the Government will take to secure the release of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38351/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): This complex consular case continues to be a top priority for the Government. The Government is doing everything it can to ensure that the Egyptian authorities are in no doubt about our determination to see this young Irish citizen returned to his home and family as soon as possible. The Government has raised this case directly with Egyptian President el-Sisi on numerous occasions, calling on him to exercise his powers under Egyptian law to resolve this case and return our citizen to Ireland. The Taoiseach spoke to him by telephone about the case on Monday 28 August. During that conversation, the Taoiseach made clear to President el-Sisi that his priority is to secure the return of our citizen to Ireland as soon as possible. President el-Sisi gave the Taoiseach his word that he would resolve the matter swiftly within the Egyptian constitutional and legal framework once the trial concludes and the verdict is known.

I have also been doing everything possible to step up the pressure on the Egyptian authorities, raising this case with Egypt's Ambassador to Ireland, Soha Gendi, and with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry, as well as discussing the matter with EU partners and other international contacts.

The trial in which this citizen is a defendant is, at last, drawing to an end. The current indications are that verdicts for the defendants will be handed down on 18 September. The Irish Government has had official observers in the court throughout the trial, and our Embassy will again be represented at the hearing on 18 September.

President el-Sisi has consistently advised that he cannot intervene while the case remains before the courts. However, in response to our firm and determined advocacy on our citizen's behalf, the Irish Government has secured a commitment from the Egyptian President that he

will act to resolve this issue once the trial has ended, and he reaffirmed this commitment when the Taoiseach spoke with him recently.

The Irish Government cannot intervene in a case that is before the courts in another country. What we can do, and what we are doing, is working relentlessly to make sure that the Egyptian Government fully understands our concerns about this case, and to provide this man and his family with every possible consular support while he remains in detention. We will be continuing to work day-in and day-out on this citizen's behalf to do everything possible to keep the pressure on the Egyptian authorities so that he can return to Ireland as soon as possible.

Passport Data

509. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Irish passports issued in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38352/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passports issued in the years requested is as follows:

Year	Amount
2012	635,600
2013	634,635
2014	632,156
2015	672,760
2016	733,060
2017 (1 January – 5th September)	615,971

Passport Applications Data

510. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the target turnaround time for passports; the actual time it is taking to process passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38353/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Information on the turnaround times for passport applications is updated weekly on the Passport Service website, www.dfa.ie/passport. The target turnaround time for Passport Express renewal applications is 15 working days. Applications in other categories such as first time applicants or those involving lost or stolen passports take longer, as additional checks are undertaken. The actual current turnaround times for these applications is 12 working days for renewals and 14 working days for applications in other categories.

As the Deputy may be aware, a new Online Passport Application Service was launched in March which allows adult citizens to renew their passports online from anywhere in the world without any paperwork or witnesses. The target turnaround time for the online service is 10 working days plus postage time. While the actual turnaround time is subject to change due to volumes of applications received, at present 92% of online applications are processed by the end of day 6. I urge Deputies to encourage all eligible applicants to avail of this fast, secure and convenient facility. As more applicants avail of the service, the efficiency gains will help improve turnaround times more broadly.

Applicants who have insufficient time to make an application through Passport Express or

are not eligible to apply online are advised to book an appointment to submit an application in person at the Passport Office in either Dublin or Cork. The appointment can be booked online at www.passportappointments.ie. It should be noted that the number of appointments available each week is limited.

Departmental Staff Data

511. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the percentage of public service staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38387/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The percentage of women full time equivalents (FTEs) employed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the years in question is provided in the following table. These figures do not include local staff employed in missions overseas or temporary staff employed on short term temporary contracts.

Date	Percentage of women FTEs
31.12.2010	55%
31.12.2011	56%
31.12.2012	57%
31.12.2013	57%
31.12.2014	56%
31.12.2015	57%
31.12.2016	56%
30.06.2017	57%

Brexit Issues

512. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the safeguards he envisages the EU will put in place to protect the rights of Irish citizens living in the UK, including Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38517/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is a priority for the Government to ensure that the rights of Irish citizens living in the UK will be protected through the withdrawal process of the UK from the European Union. To this end, the Government prioritised the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the maintenance of the Common Travel Area for the withdrawal negotiations. The Government was therefore pleased at the strong affirmation in the EU's negotiating directives that the fact that Irish citizens residing in Northern Ireland will continue to enjoy rights as EU citizens will be taken into account in the Withdrawal Agreement. The EU's position also provides for the recognition of existing agreements and arrangements between Ireland and the UK, such as the Common Travel Area, which are in conformity with EU law. In this context, I further welcome and support the European Commission Task Force's paper on Guiding Principles for Ireland/Northern Ireland in the context of the Brexit negotiating process. This paper reflects the priority Irish areas identified by the Government, including those concerning the protection of Irish citizens living in the UK.

I have also welcomed the publication by the UK of its paper on Ireland/Northern Ireland, where there is convergence on the shared objectives to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process, and to maintain the Common Travel Area. However, I have

underlined that the UK needs to back this up with tangible commitments that can pave the way for practical solutions.

I was happy with the progress made in the most recent round of negotiations. However, the Government is not complacent and is clear that there is substantial work to be done still in this first phase of negotiations. I am confident that our EU partners understand the priority placed by Ireland on the protection of the rights of Irish citizens, in the context of our unique circumstances, and I will continue to work with our partners and the EU Taskforce to that end.

Northern Ireland

513. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions with the US authorities regarding the appointment of a special envoy to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38552/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The question of a US Special Envoy for Northern Ireland is a matter for consideration by the US Administration. Successive US Administrations have provided immensely valuable support to the peace process over the last three decades. The Government look forward to the continued engagement by the current US Administration in Northern Ireland, including that of the US State Department. In the immediate period ahead, the Government would particularly welcome the continued support of the US Administration and Congress in encouraging the parties in Northern Ireland to take the necessary steps to ensure that the devolved power-sharing institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are re-established without delay, which is in the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Diplomatic Representation

514. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions with the US authorities regarding the appointment of an ambassador to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38553/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The appointment of ambassadors by the United States is solely a matter for the U.S. authorities. Pending the nomination of a new U.S. Ambassador to Ireland by President Trump and the subsequent confirmation of the appointment by the US Senate, we will continue to engage closely with the U.S. Embassy in Dublin, under the leadership of Chargé d'Affaires, Reece Smyth, on the whole range of issues pertaining to the Ireland-US relationship. We do of course look forward to the arrival of a new US Ambassador in due course.

Passport Services

515. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the required additional resources needed to address additional demand for passport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38667/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Since January 2017, a total of 230 Temporary Clerical Officers have been assigned to the Passport Service and appointed to the Passport Offices in Balbriggan, Mount Street and Cork. Temporary Clerical Officers in the Passport Service are typically hired on twenty-six week contracts and most of

these initial contracts were extended during the year for a further six – eight weeks. Further, a number of additional permanent Clerical Officers from within the Department have been assigned to the Passport Service in response to the exceptionally high volumes of applications received this year. Targeted overtime for the Passport Service was also sanctioned to increase processing capacity. These measures contributed to bringing the average turnaround time for Passport Express renewals in line with the target of fifteen working days. First-time applications and applications to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports take longer due to additional security checks.

The Passport Service launched an Online Passport Renewal Service on 30 March 2017, through which adult citizens resident anywhere in the world can renew their passports quickly, securely and efficiently. As take-up of the Online Passport Application service increases, it will enhance overall passport processing capacity and contribute to reducing turnaround times for all channels. I therefore urge all Deputies to encourage adults who are renewing their passports to do so online. The turnaround time for online renewals is just ten working days plus postage time.

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

My Department will continue to monitor the situation and the need for additional resources will be kept under active review.

Brexit Issues

516. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38695/17]

517. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38711/17]

518. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38727/17]

519. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38743/17]

520. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38759/17]

521. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38775/17]

523. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38807/17]

525. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38839/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 516 to 521, inclusive, 523 and 525 together.

The comprehensive document "*Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach*" published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectorial policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

My Department has lead responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government approach to the EU-UK negotiations and it will continue to work closely with all Departments in this context to work towards ensuring that Ireland's priorities – including in relation to sectorial issues – are appropriately reflected in the EU's negotiating position as the process evolves.

Brexit will also have implications for a broad range of policy areas that fall under the responsibility of my Department. We have cooperated closely with the UK within the EU on a number of these important areas, including in areas such as trade, the single market, and development policy. A key priority for my Department is therefore to build on our partnerships with the remaining EU Member States and develop new alliances within the EU and engage more proactively with the EU institutions. This work is already underway. Discussions with EU partners have revealed that they too are very mindful of the need to intensify alliances post-Brexit and are also looking at how best to do so.

We have already seen the implications that Brexit has had for our consular and passport services. There has been a marked increase in demand for passports and citizenship via foreign birth registration from applicants in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In this regard, the Passport Service in Dublin, Cork and London as well as Consular Division have recruited a number of additional temporary and full-time officers to meet increased Passport and Foreign Birth Registration demands including increased demand as a result of Brexit.

It is also the Government's objective to exploit fully any opportunities arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU and my Department, in collaboration with other Government Departments and State Agencies, is working to support Irish businesses to identify new opportunities for their products and services by diversifying into new markets as well as intensifying efforts in existing markets.

Brexit Negotiations

522. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of meetings he has had with the Brexit negotiation taskforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38791/17]

527. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the planned meetings with his European colleagues and officials to address Brexit related issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38871/17]

540. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting with Mr. Michel Barnier in Brussels; the issues that were discussed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38953/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 522, 527 and 540 together.

Since taking up office, engagement on Brexit with EU partners has been a central element of my work. This approach has yielded clear results in ensuring that Ireland's unique issues and concerns have been fully understood by our EU 27 partners and have been reflected in the EU's negotiating position. As the negotiations enter an important phase over the coming weeks and months, continuing such engagement with EU partners, both at political and official level, will remain a key priority.

On Monday 4 September, I met with Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Negotiator on Brexit, and his team, our second meeting since my appointment. It was a constructive meeting in which

we discussed the evolution of the negotiations. I welcomed the progress that has been made in the areas of citizens' rights and a range of technical separation issues. However, it is clear that there are still many issues outstanding and much work is still required ahead of any decision by the European Council on whether sufficient progress has been made. In this regard, Mr Barnier and I agreed on the need for the UK to engage constructively on all of the withdrawal issues, including the financial settlement, which, not unexpectedly, has been the most contentious issue in the negotiations so far.

During our discussion, I also thanked Mr. Barnier for pursuing Ireland's unique interests in the Brexit negotiations and for the high level of engagement that Ireland enjoys with his team. We agreed that, while good progress was made in the last round of negotiations on the Common Travel Area, more detailed work is required on protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the peace process, including in regard to North South cooperation and to avoiding a hard border, as well as other issues such as protecting the EU rights of Irish citizens in Northern Ireland. Overall, I welcomed the indications that EU and UK objectives on the Irish issues are converging but noted that the UK needs to back this up with tangible commitments that can pave the way for practical solutions. During the meeting, Mr Barnier confirmed that the Taskforce would publish a paper on "*Guiding Principles for the Dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland*", building on the European Council Guidelines agreed earlier this year.

I welcome that the paper, which was subsequently published on 7 September, reflects the priority Irish issues identified by the Government: protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, and the peace process, including avoiding a hard border, and maintaining the Common Travel Area. The paper also sets out a number of principles that will guide the ongoing dialogue on Ireland and Northern Ireland. I and my officials will continue to work closely with Mr Barnier and his team to advance Ireland's concerns in these negotiations.

During my visit to Brussels last week I also met with MEPs from across the political spectrum within the European Parliament, including with Guy Verhofstadt, the Parliament's Coordinator on Brexit, and with Irish MEPs. This provided a valuable opportunity to engage with them at the beginning of a new parliamentary term and to update them on Ireland's perspective on the negotiations. I am glad that Guy Verhofstadt will be visiting Ireland on 21 September, which is a further indication of the priority afforded by the European Parliament to Ireland's unique concerns within the context of Brexit.

Since my appointment, I have also held bilateral meetings with a number of my EU colleagues, including my Estonian, Luxembourg, French, Slovak, Belgian and Spanish counterparts. I also welcomed the Finnish Foreign Minister to Ireland in July. Over the weekend I met with my counterparts from Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovenia at the Gymnich/Informal Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council.

My officials also continue to meet their counterparts in other Member States, and of course the Permanent Representation in Brussels is also key to this work.

In my meetings with EU partners to date, I have laid particular emphasis on Ireland's objective of protecting the gains of the peace process and avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. I have strongly emphasised the need for an imaginative and flexible political solution. In so doing, I have been equally clear that we will only pursue solutions that are compatible with our aim of protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Ireland's place in it. I will continue to deliver this message in my engagements in the coming weeks.

Question No. 523 answered with Question No. 516.

Brexit Staff

524. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38823/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Additional capabilities and resources have been assigned across my Department to address issues arising from the complex process of the UK exit from the EU. Currently, no Brexit related vacancies remain to be filled in the Department. My Department is continually monitoring the additional needs associated with management of this process and engages with the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform as necessary. The measures my Department put in place to manage the initial phase of our response to the UK decision to leave the EU remain under review. The Department will require additional staff resources as specific decisions are taken to further augment our diplomatic network.

Question No. 525 answered with Question No. 516.

Brexit Issues

526. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38855/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Engagement with stakeholders is an important pillar of the Government's overall response to Brexit. A major initiative undertaken under the joint leadership of my Department and the Department of the Taoiseach has been the All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit, which was established in November 2016. Its inaugural plenary session marked the beginning of a series of public consultations with a broad range of stakeholders. Following on from this, nineteen All-Island Sectorial Dialogues have taken place across the country. The second plenary session held in February 2017 enabled my Department to take stock of the progress of the sectorial dialogues to date. It also provided an opportunity to capture the views of many of those most directly affected from across the island of Ireland. To date, over 1,500 representatives from a range of industry and civil society groups have taken part in the All-Island Civic Dialogue process. A list of participating organisations and groups at the second plenary session in February 2017 is contained in the document *All-Island Civic Dialogue: A Compendium*, which is available on the Government's Brexit portal.

The work of Civic Dialogue process to date has reaffirmed the priority issues identified by the Government ahead of the negotiations. The concerns and issues identified across a range of sectors were included in the Government's comprehensive document "*Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach*" published on 2 May. As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for Brexit, I am fully committed to the continuation of this valuable initiative and I am convening the third plenary session of the All-Island Civic Dialogue on 28 September.

Additionally, I have decided to establish a Brexit Stakeholder Forum as a means to inform and explain the Government's position during the Article 50 negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The Forum will be of particular value as the negotiations enter Phase Two, when parallel discussions are expected to begin on the framework of the future

relationship between the EU and the UK.

Membership of this Forum is naturally more limited than that of the All-Island Civic Dialogue, to allow for a more focused and interactive discussion with key players. It may be augmented as required. Its first meeting will take place this week and will include representatives from the British-Irish Chamber of Commerce, Chambers Ireland, European Movement Ireland, the Institute of International and European Affairs, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Irish Exporters' Association, the Irish Universities Association, IBEC and the North/South Joint Business Council. State agencies will also be present, and, in a personal capacity, some experts on EU issues. As the Deputy is aware, party Brexit spokespersons have also been invited: himself from Fianna Fáil, Brendan Howlin (Labour), David Cullinane (Sinn Féin) and Eamon Ryan (Green Party). The Forum is organised by my Department and other Departments will attend in an observer capacity. The intention is for the Forum to meet every four to six weeks.

Question No. 527 answered with Question No. 522.

Brexit Issues

528. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38887/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Research and analysis by Departments on the impact that Brexit may have across a wide range of policy areas is ongoing and of course involves my own Department both in its co-ordination role and in its own right. Planning for, contributing to and following the EU-UK negotiations requires research on and analysis of very many legal, institutional, and political issues, and is led by the European Union Division in co-operation with the Ireland and United Kingdom and Americas Division, the Legal Division, the Political Division and the Trade Division. Our Permanent Representation in Brussels, and our Embassies in all Member States, send in a constant stream of reports describing and analysing the concerns and priorities of the EU Institutions and our partners. My Department also works closely with the European Commission and European Parliament Offices here in Dublin and with civil society organisations including the Institute for International and European Affairs and European Movement Ireland. With funding from this Department, the IIEA is undertaking research on the future shape of the EU and the new strategic alliances that Ireland will need to develop within the EU after Brexit. The analysis will also consider the macro-economic effects of Brexit and the EU institutional implications of Britain's withdrawal from the EU. This work will build on the extensive analysis being undertaken by a range of organisations, both in Ireland and further afield and will be presented in a series of research papers over the coming three years.

Departmental Expenditure

529. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38903/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department is engaging with the Department for Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to the 2018 Es-

timate Allocations. This will be announced on Budget Day in the Oireachtas by the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform on 10 October 2017. The Department is not in a position to comment in advance.

Consular Services Provision

530. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he plans to open an embassy in Georgia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38913/17]

531. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when he plans to open an embassy in Iran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38914/17]

532. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to extend the diplomatic network; the new consulates or embassies that will open in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38915/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 530 to 532, inclusive, together.

The scale and configuration of the State's diplomatic network in promoting Ireland's interests and values in a fast-changing world is under continual review by my Department and by the Government. The ambition set by the Taoiseach to double our global footprint by 2025 reflects the scale and complexity of challenges that we face as a country in the years ahead including from Brexit and from growing protectionism internationally. I fully share his view that a strengthened international presence is vital in responding to these challenges and also in seizing new opportunities. These includes the further diversification of markets for trade and investment and building alliances to underpin the rules-based system that has served small globalised countries like Ireland so well. We must also re-double our efforts to promote justice, equality and peaceful international cooperation – values dear to our heart as a nation and which are more relevant than ever.

As specific decisions are taken to augment our network, we also have to ensure that the vital services infrastructure and policy support at headquarters are up to the task. With our existing network of 80 missions, many of which are staffed by officials from across the civil and public service in addition to our own staff, and co-located with agencies such as IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and others, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is uniquely placed to provide effective leadership for this ambitious initiative.

At present, Ireland's bilateral relationship with Georgia is fostered on a concurrent basis through our Embassy in Sofia and our bilateral relationship with Iran is fostered, again on a concurrent basis, through our Embassy in Ankara. Ireland is also represented in Iran by an Honorary Consul. The question of opening resident diplomatic missions in Georgia and Iran will be considered in the context of the plan to augment our network to 2025.

Consular Services Provision

533. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the countries in which Ireland is lacking an embassy, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38922/17]

534. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the countries in which Irish embassies and consulates exist; the number of staff in each embassy and

consulate, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38923/17]

536. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a review of our diplomatic missions has begun further to the Taoiseach's comments on doubling Ireland's global footprint; if so, the date of commencement of the review; the estimated completion date of this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38925/17]

537. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the specific actions that will be taken by his Department further to the Taoiseach's comments on doubling Ireland's global footprint; the targets set; the timeframe for reaching same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38926/17]

538. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the meetings he has had with relevant stakeholders in relation to doubling Ireland's global footprint further to the Taoiseach's comments; the dates of those meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38927/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 533, 534 and 536 to 538, inclusive, together.

Ireland's diplomatic network includes 61 Embassies, seven multilateral missions, 11 Consulates General and one Representative office. Many of our Ambassadors are also accredited to additional countries on a concurrent basis, which enables us to maintain diplomatic relations with a total of 178 countries. The locations of Irish Embassies, Permanent Missions, Consulates General and other offices are set out in the table below.

The website of the Department (www.dfa.ie) provides a list of every country in the world and the status of Ireland's diplomatic relationship with them, including those countries where Ireland does not currently have an embassy.

In the available time it was not possible to provide the number of staff in each embassy and consulate in tabular form. However, 310 staff of the Department are currently assigned to Ireland's missions overseas and 352 are locally recruited in missions overseas.

The scale and configuration of the State's diplomatic network in promoting Ireland's interests and values in a fast-changing world is under continual review by my Department and by the Government. The ambition set by the Taoiseach reflects the scale and complexity of challenges that we face as a country in the years ahead including from Brexit and from growing protectionism internationally. I fully share his view that a strengthened international presence is vital in responding to these challenges and also in seizing new opportunities. These includes the further diversification of markets for trade and investment and building alliances to underpin the rules-based system that has served small globalised countries like Ireland so well. We must also re-double our efforts to promote justice, equality and peaceful international cooperation – values dear to our heart as a nation and which are more relevant than ever.

As we develop our global footprint we also have to ensure that the vital services infrastructure and policy support at headquarters are up to the task. With our existing network of 80 missions, many of which are staffed by officials from across the civil and public service in addition to our own staff, and co-located with agencies such as IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Bord Bia and others, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is uniquely placed to provide effective leadership for this ambitious initiative.

Location of Irish Embassies, Permanent Missions, Consulates General and other offices

Embassies - (A-L)	Embassies - (M-Z)	Multilateral Missions
ArgentinaAustraliaAustriaBelgiumBulgariaBrazilCanadaChinaCroatiaCyprusCzech RepublicDenmarkEgyptEthiopiaEstoniaFinlandFranceGermanyGreeceHoly SeeHungaryIndiaIndonesiaIsraelItalyJapanKenyaKorea, Republic ofLatviaLithuaniaLuxembourgMalawi	Malaysia Malta Mexico Mozambique Netherlands Nigeria Norway Poland Portugal Romania Russia Saudi Arabia Sierra Leone Singapore Slovakia Slovenia South Africa Spain Sweden Switzerland Tanzania Thailand Turkey U.A.E. Uganda United Kingdom U.S.A. Vietnam Zambia	Council of Europe – Strasbourg European Union – Brussels OSCE – Vienna United Nations – New York United Nations – Geneva OECD/UNESCO – Paris-Brussels Liaison Office (Partnership for Peace)
		Consulates-General
		Sydney, Australia Sao Paulo, Brazil Hong Kong, China Shanghai, China Edinburgh, United Kingdom Atlanta, USA Austin, USA Boston, USA Chicago, USA San Francisco, USA New York, USA
		Other Offices
		Ramallah – Representative Office to the Palestinian Authority.

Breakdown of missions by region

Region	Number
Africa	10

Americas	12
Asia Pacific	13
Europe	33
Middle East	5
Multi-lateral	7
Total	80

Consular Services Expenditure

535. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the average cost of running an embassy and a consulate respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38924/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department is responsible for two Votes – Vote 28 (Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Vote 27 (International Cooperation). The work of our embassy and consulate network around the world continues to be important in Ireland's economic recovery and the restoration of our international reputation. Our network promotes Ireland's political, economic and cultural interests and values, provide services to our citizens, develop strategic stakeholder relationships and represent Ireland in international organisations.

Our Embassies' work in support of Ireland's interests includes:

Promoting Ireland as a source of high-quality exports, a destination for investment, research, study and tourism to targeted audiences and contacts.

Supporting trade missions and other trade-focussed high-level visits, record numbers of which have taken place in the last five years.

Directly assisting Irish companies with advice, introductions and working to resolve regulatory or market access issues, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland.

Providing frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas.

Influencing and negotiating for Ireland on issues that could impact our interests and priorities.

The cost of operating an embassy and consulate can vary significantly depending of the location, the type, the range of services provided and the resulting overall size of the embassy. Larger embassies/consulates would cost in the region of €1m to €5m per annum to operate. Smaller single diplomatic officer embassies/consulates would cost in the region of €0.5m per annum to operate.

Question Nos. 536 to 538, inclusive, answered with Question No. 533.

Question No. 539 answered with Question No. 495.

Question No. 540 answered with Question No. 522.

Question No. 541 answered with Question No. 495.

Passport Applications

542. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the increased number of applications post Brexit from persons born and living in the UK; the resources put in place to deal with the increased number of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38955/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The number of passport applications received so far this year from applicants living in Northern Ireland has increased by 33%, with applications from the rest of UK up by 40% on the same period last year. To respond to seasonal spike in demand and the general increase in applications, a total of 230 Temporary Clerical Officers were recruited into the Passport Service this year. These officers are assisting permanent staff with passport entitlement checking and customer care, including by responding to queries received via phone calls, emails and social media. Temporary Clerical Officers in the Passport Service are typically hired on twenty-six week contracts and most of these initial contracts were extended during the year for a further period of six to eight weeks. In addition, a number of permanent staff were also recruited and are assigned to the Passport Service.

The Passport Service launched an Online Passport Renewal Service on 30 March 2017, through which adult citizens resident anywhere in the world can renew their passports quickly, securely and efficiently. This online renewal service already accounts for almost 20% of total applications, and the associated efficiency gains have increased capacity to deal with high volumes of applications in all categories. The Embassy of Ireland in London is actively engaged in promoting the online service to Irish citizens renewing their passport in the region. I urge all Deputies to encourage adults who are renewing their passports to do so online. The turnaround time for online renewals is just ten working days plus postage time.

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

The Passport Service will continue to closely monitor the situation to ensure the effective deployment of staff resources so as to minimise the impact on processing times of increased numbers of applications from persons living in the UK. The need for additional resources will be kept under review.

Question No. 543 answered with Question No. 495.

Departmental Expenditure

544. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the detail of all moneys given or paid to an organisation (details supplied) in each of the past ten years; the purpose of these funds in each case; the person or bodies to which these moneys were paid; the rationale for so doing in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38986/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department has not provided funding for the running costs or capital costs of the organisation to which the Deputy refers in the past ten years. Under the Embassy Initiatives strand of the subhead “Cultural relations with other countries”, funding was provided by the Embassy of Ireland in Brussels and the Permanent Representation to the EU towards the costs of a number of cultural events that took place at the organisation. These amounts are set out in the table below.

Payment Date	Description	Amount (€)
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27.07.2010	Part funding of 'Taste of Joyce' Bloomsday event	1,000
13.12.2010	Part funding of Culture Night	1,300
06.01.2012	Provision of refreshments at International Film Festival	200
03.09.2012	Reimbursement for the procurement of a Bloomsday animation	360
14.12.2012	Part funding of an Irish dancing event	700
18.12.2012	Irish music concert as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge	1,750
10.12.2013	Travel and subsistence costs for contributors to Séamus Heaney commemoration events	1,429

The Embassy of Ireland in Brussels has a funding agreement with the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS), a separate network which was founded to promote interest in and to support the expansion of Irish Studies throughout Europe and which is located at the organisation in question. Funding for EFACIS, which began in 2013, amounts to €17,500 per annum.

Question No. 545 answered with Question No. 488.

Disability Support Services

546. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the role of access officers within local authorities; if there are guidelines from his Department regarding this role; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37319/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): Section 26 of the Disability Act 2005 seeks to ensure the provision of mainstream public services in a way that is accessible to persons with disabilities. This section requires public bodies to ensure that service provision for people with disabilities is integrated with services for other citizens, where this is practicable and appropriate. Public bodies are required to give assistance to persons with disabilities for the purpose of accessing these services, if requested, and are required to have available to them the expertise and skills necessary for the delivery of accessible services. To this effect, public bodies must appoint at least one member of staff as that organisation's access officer, to arrange or co-ordinate this assistance.

The National Disability Authority has published a Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information provided by Public Bodies. The Code of Practice is available on the Authority's website and sets out a number of ways in which a public body can achieve the goals set out in section 26 of the Act by adequately supporting and resourcing the access officer role.

In addition to the Code of Practice, the Authority has also produced a non-statutory Accessibility Toolkit, which is available from its website, as part of a wider commitment to provide accessible public services. Following a review of the operation of the role of access officers,

the Accessibility Toolkit provides guidance and advice to public bodies on the number of access officers required and the distribution of their responsibilities. However, it is of course for each public body to choose the model that best suits their customers' needs.

In addition, the Accessibility Toolkit also provides guidance and advice on the provision of training for role of access officer and what supports should be provided to access officers in the execution of their duties.

Work Permits Applications

547. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a work permit application by a person (details supplied). [37871/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that correspondence was received from the person in question, to review the decision made in July 2016 to refuse them permission to work in the State without the requirement of a work permit. This review is currently under consideration and correspondence will issue to this person in the coming weeks.

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

Refugee Resettlement Programme

548. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Syrian refugees resettled here in 2016 and to date in 2017; the anticipated number to be settled during the last quarter of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38088/17]

643. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of refugees to date in 2017 that have arrived here under the relocation and resettlement programmes, in tabular form; if the target of accepting 4,000 refugees by the end of 2017 will be reached; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38324/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 548 and 643 together.

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State; approximately 2,622 through the EU relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, 1,040 under the UNHCR-led refugee resettlement programme currently focussed on resettling refugees from Lebanon (519 by the end of 2016 and the remainder in 2017) and the balance through a variety of mechanisms. The Deputy should also be aware the actual numbers eligible for relocation from Italy and Greece are much lower than those originally envisaged under the two Council Decisions of September 2015 (160,000 people). In its most recent publication on Relocation and Resettlement, pub-

lished on 7 September, the European Commission estimates some 26,975 people eligible and registered for relocation in Italy and Greece have been relocated to other Member States to date, with approximately 4,700 people registered and still to be relocated from Greece.

The relevant instruments - the two Council relocation Decisions and the three separate Government decisions on programme refugees - envisaged an end-2017 timeframe for the bulk of the cohort. However, it is important to note that the Government commitment to accept 4,000 people was not time limited.

Ireland will deliver its full commitment on programme refugees. Primarily because the numbers anticipated in the Council Decisions, in terms of eligible nationalities, do not exist on the ground in either Greece or Italy as outlined above, Ireland, in common with the vast majority of other Member States, will not be in a position to relocate the anticipated numbers of asylum seekers. Despite the significant shortfall in persons available for relocation, Ireland will have fulfilled two out of its three commitments by year end. We will have doubled our resettlement commitment and fully met our commitments to Greece. Lack of co-operation in relation to security assessments by the Italian authorities has prevented any progress being made in relation to the small numbers registered in Italy.

Table 1 sets out the position regarding the assignment of the 4,000.

Table 1: Table of Total Numbers under Government Decision

Relocation Strand	Numbers
Council Decision 2015/1523	600
Council Decision 2015/1601	2,022
Total Relocation	2,622
Resettlement Strand	
Government Decision 09/06/15	520
Government Decision 06/07/16	260
Government Decision 29/11/16	260
Total Resettlement	1,040
Total Unaccompanied Minors Calais (Government Decision 10/11/16)	200 (up to)
Mechanism as yet undecided	138
Grand Total	4000

In summary, as of 7 September 2017, the current numbers of persons that have arrived under both the programme refugee resettlement strand and the relocated asylum seeker strands of the programme are set out in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively:

Table 2: Resettled Programme Refugees

Year	People	Adults	Minors	Age 0-4	Age 5-12	Age 13-17
2015	163	73	90	32	46	12
2016	356	167	189	53	101	35
2017	266	119	147	51	83	13
Total	785	359	426	136	230	60

As regards the programme refugee strand of the IRPP, Ireland had taken in 519 of the original commitment of 520 by the end of 2016, a year ahead of schedule. Last year the Government doubled its commitment under resettlement to 1,040 and the number of persons who have arrived from Lebanon under refugee resettlement now stands at 785. A balance of about 270

refugees in Lebanon have been selected, assessed under the programme refugee resettlement strand and will arrive later this year, or early next year, contingent on a range of factors including processing capacity by overseas partners and available space in Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) in Ireland.

Table 3: Relocated Asylum Seekers

Year	People	Adults	Minors	Age 0-4	Age 5-12	Age 13-17
2016	240	132	108	42	45	21
2017	284	171	113	45	50	18
Total	524	303	221	87	95	39

In terms of the relocation aspect of the IRPP, allocations under the relevant EU Council Decisions are composed of three elements:

- an intake from Greece of 1,089 asylum seekers
- an intake from Italy of 623 asylum seekers and
- an allocation of 910 asylum seekers which has not been assigned by the European Commission to either Italy or Greece.

Ireland will meet in full its commitment to Greece. 524 of the allocation of 1,089 are already in the State and a further 489 have been assessed and are awaiting transportation. Sufficient missions to fill any quota remaining under this strand of the Programme will be scheduled with the Greek authorities. However, Italy, unlike Greece, will not permit security assessments to be undertaken by other States on its territory. Accordingly, Ireland has been unable to undertake security assessments in Italy of the cohort eligible for relocation to Ireland. It has therefore not been possible for Ireland to take asylum seekers from Italy. However, efforts remain ongoing to try to resolve this impasse.

In terms of the unallocated portion contained in the two EU Council Decisions referred to above, which in the case of Ireland amounts to approximately 910 persons, Ireland cannot access this component until a proposal is made by the Commission to allocate these numbers as between Greece and Italy in line with the Council Decision. Given that the numbers anticipated by the two Council Decisions (160,000) do not actually exist on the ground in either Italy or Greece, in terms of eligible nationalities (in Greece this is overwhelmingly Syrian and in Italy, Eritrean), it is highly unlikely that this element of the Council Decision can be implemented by any Member State.

Ireland is doing everything it can to give effect to the EU relocation Decisions but as can be seen from the above information these Decisions are unlikely to yield the anticipated numbers for reasons entirely outside of Ireland's control. In the areas where Ireland has been able to implement its resettlement programme - Lebanon, in the case of programme refugees; and Greece, in the case of relocated asylum seekers - Ireland has been able to meet and surpass its full obligations.

I can inform the Deputy that if, despite all Ireland's efforts, the relocation mechanism does not permit Ireland to take in the number of asylum seekers foreseen under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, then the Government commitment to take in 4,000 people remains and Ireland will take in these numbers through other mechanisms. Officials are currently undertaking a full review of the IRPP with a view to establishing how best Ireland's remaining obligations might be met and through what channels. When this review is complete appropriate decisions can then be taken. Decisions taken at EU level with regard to the ongoing migration

crisis will of course impact on any such deliberations.

Property Registration

549. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for right of way by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38268/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to Deputies and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Language Schools Accreditation

550. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the registration of English language schools which cater for students outside the European Union; the way in which a new school can register in the meantime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36801/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Student migration and international education has contributed to Irish society, both culturally and economically, over many years. Its importance has been recognised in successive Programmes for Government and is underscored in Ireland's International Education Strategies, the most recent of which was published in October 2016. Ireland's strong reputation in international education, including English language education, has been built up over a very long period through the close cooperation of key Government Departments, including my own Department, and the wider sector. My Department is strongly committed to delivering all the reforms agreed by Government and jointly announced with the Department of Education and Skills.

One such reform was the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) introduced in 2015. The ILEP is intended as a temporary measure, while a more comprehensive quality assurance framework, the International Education Mark, is being put in place by my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills. The ILEP lists those programmes, offered by both public and private educational providers, which are eligible for an immigration permission as an international student. The ILEP is only open to those offering English language programmes (of 25 weeks or more duration) and higher education programmes of at least 60 ECTS (leading to a recognised award by an Irish awarding body). All educational providers are prohibited from recruiting non-EEA international students to programmes which are not listed on the ILEP.

The temporary standards being applied by my Department are intended to ensure that non-

EEA students receive a high-quality education. These standards are clearly set out in comprehensive guidelines published on the website of the Irish Immigration and Naturalisation Service (<http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Students>) and have been agreed jointly by officials from my Department and the Department of Education and Skills. That Department has responsibility for the quality related aspects of international education, while my Department has responsibility for immigration related aspects. Both Departments regularly review the ILEP criteria to ensure they remain fit for purpose, particularly, in view of the extended lifespan of the ILEP. Officials of both Departments meet in committee to determine the eligibility of new programmes and providers to be listed on the ILEP.

The ILEP is periodically open for applications to list new programmes and this process and the requirements as regards supporting documentation etc. are all clearly set out in the published criteria. Completed applications will be assessed to ensure they meet all the requirements for listing, including an examination of the features of the programme and the provider's capacity and bona fides. Unsuccessful applications will be given an opportunity to appeal the decision of the joint Departmental committee. Any appeal is heard by more senior officials who will consider any new information provided in this context.

Garda Data

551. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there has been no training of detectives in the Dublin metropolitan region Garda stations for the past nine years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36812/17]

552. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a competition for the appointment of detectives in the Dublin metropolitan region Garda stations was advised in 2015 and subsequently cancelled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36813/17]

553. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason most of the personnel in the detective unit in the Dublin metropolitan region Garda stations are detective aides and have not received sufficient training in criminal investigations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36814/17]

554. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who are attached to detective units in the Dublin metropolitan region Garda stations by detective gardaí and detective aids; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36815/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 551 to 554, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, including by arranging for the training of its members and civilian staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to him on receipt of same.

Direct Provision System

555. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated

cost of abolishing the system of direct provision allowing asylum seekers the right to work; and the estimated cost of providing them with full access to all social protection benefits, as necessary. [36837/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Supreme Court in the matter of *N.V.H v. The Minister for Justice and Equality*, delivered in May of this year its judgment on the right of access to the labour market for those seeking international protection in Ireland.

Clearly, this is an important judgment and its potential implications, which also extend to other Government Departments, are being examined carefully. The Court itself recognises the complexities around this issue in that it acknowledges the Executive function in not only controlling who should enter the State but also to regulate the activities of non-citizens while in the State and has had to consider the distinctions of rights between citizens and non-citizens in the context of Article 40.1 of the Constitution. The Court has concluded that in an international protection system with no temporal limit on the decision making process, an absolute prohibition on the right to work is contrary to the right to seek employment under the Constitution. The Court recognises that this a matter for the Executive and Legislature to consider and accordingly has adjourned consideration of the Order the Court should make for a period of six months. The State will make submissions to the Court in relation to the format of the Order at the appropriate time. In the interim, the legal status as regards access to the labour market for international protection applicants remains unchanged, as set out in Section 16(3)(b) of the International Protection Act.

A whole of Government approach has been adopted to examine the implications of the judgment and to propose appropriate solutions as quickly as possible. With the approval of Government, I have established an Inter-Departmental Taskforce to undertake this work. As part of their deliberations, the Taskforce is examining the implications that granting access to the labour market will have on those applicants who have accepted the offer of Direct Provision and for those who have chosen to remain outside the Direct Provision system with regard to other State services. The Taskforce is also examining the cost implications for the implementation of any proposed solutions including impacts on welfare, housing, education and training, health care, etc.

In many EU Member States, the right to work is not an unfettered right for applicants, often arising after a particular period of time, usually 9 months to a year. In many instances access may be limited to particular job categories or may lead to the withdrawal of other financial supports. All of these matters are being carefully considered by the Taskforce as to their impact and to reflect the existing requirements placed on other Third Country Nationals who come to Ireland as lawful economic migrants. The Taskforce will report back to Government shortly, once it has completed its deliberations.

Immigration Status

556. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36877/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they recently received representations from the Deputy which included correspondence from the persons concerned. This is currently being considered and INIS will be writing out to the persons concerned shortly.

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.

Deportation Orders

557. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36878/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, the persons concerned were notified, by letters dated 14 August 2017, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. They were given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them.

The position in the State of the persons concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. All representations submitted will be 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

558. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36879/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, as advised in responses to previous PQs, it would appear that the person concerned entered the State as a visitor in June 2007 and has remained in the State since then without the appropriate permission. I am informed that correspondence has issued to the person in question requesting further information.

This person should be aware that it is unlawful for them, under the Immigration Act 2004, to reside in the State without permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable, under section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both. As the person in question does not have immigration permission to remain in the State, they are not entitled to work.

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

559. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36880/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that notifications have issued to the persons concerned pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

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

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

560. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36881/17]

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 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

561. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36882/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Deputy was advised in replies to his previous parliamentary questions dated 27 September 2016 and 09 May 2017, that the person concerned registered as a student in the State on 10 March 2014 and that their permission expired on 2 March 2015.

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

As previously advised, the person concerned should present themselves at their local Immigration Office without delay.

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

Immigration Status

562. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36883/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Deputy was advised - in replies to previous Parliamentary Questions dated 22 June 2017, 9 May 2017, and 27 September 2016 - that no application for immigration permission has been received from the person concerned.

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

As previously advised, the person concerned should present themselves at their local Immigration Office without delay.

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

Deportation Orders

563. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding residency status, including eligibility for naturalisation, in the case of a person (details supplied). [36884/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 14 July 2017, that the Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of them. They were given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why they should not have a Deportation Order made against them.

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

The Deputy should note that as the person concerned has no current right of residency in the State, they would not be in a position to meet the lawful residency criteria applicable to persons applying to my Department for a Certificate of Naturalisation.

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

Immigration Status

564. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36885/17]

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 applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child.

I understand that INIS has been in ongoing correspondence with the person concerned and that documentation was received from them as recently as 23 August 2017. I understand, however, that further documentation is required and the person concerned will be contacted, in writing, shortly.

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

565. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36886/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that they are currently considering this case and will be writing out to the person concerned very shortly.

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

Direct Provision System

566. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the rationale behind the regime of direct provision of refugees here. [36936/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The need to establish a comprehensive system for the provision of accommodation and related services arose from the increasing number of asylum seekers arriving into the State in 1999. Prior to this, asylum seekers were treated as homeless under the structures then in place.

These proved unsuited to the situation facing Ireland in 1999 and subsequent years, when the number of asylum seekers arriving in Ireland increased dramatically. A total of 7,724 asylum applications were received in 1999 and a further 10,938 in the following year. Of these, most presented themselves in Dublin. The homeless service of the then Eastern Health Board could not cope and there was a serious prospect of widespread homelessness among asylum seekers.

In response to this serious and unprecedented challenge, the then Minister for Justice, John O'Donoghue T.D., chaired a cross-departmental group to examine the issue. From this, the Directorate for Asylum Support Services (DASS), under the aegis of the then Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, was established in November 1999 to co-ordinate the scheme of dispersal and direct provision for asylum seekers. DASS was subsequently replaced by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) on 2 April, 2001. The government policy of dispersal to locations outside the capital was also decided on in order to alleviate the burden on State service providers in Dublin and surrounding areas and to spread the burden of education, medical and other services across the State, as far as practicable.

It is a common misconception that ‘direct provision’ relates only to the Department of Justice and Equality. The Government has made a conscious decision that asylum seekers would access services, such as health and education, through the existing mainstream services. This also implied that the Government would not introduce separate, parallel services specifically for asylum seekers. It is for this reason that such mainstream services are not, in the main, provided in centres, unless the Department concerned has deemed it more appropriate to do so. For example, the Department of Social Protection provides CWO services and the HSE provides GP services in Mosney as the number of residents there (approx 800 persons) make this a more efficient option. In general, the guiding principle is that those in the protection process are provided with whichever services they are entitled to on the same basis as the indigenous population and through the same systems.

Currently, without the existence of accommodation centres for protection applicants, it is likely that such responsibility would revert back to the homeless services, now provided by local authorities, as there is no other mechanism to cater for this group. It is also likely that the homeless services in the Dublin local authorities and surrounding areas would come under disproportionate pressure from applicants.

The system of supports for those in the protection process was included in a major review carried out in 2014 by Judge Bryan McMahon. The majority of recommendations in that report have been and are being implemented and details of the progress are available on the website of the Department.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Programme for Partnership Government states: “Long durations in direct provision are acknowledged to have a negative impact on family life. We are therefore committed to reforming the Direct Provision system, with particular focus on families and children.” Together with the recommendations of the McMahon report, the implementation of the provisions of the International Protection Act 2015 are making a real difference to the overall system of direct provision in Ireland.

Direct Provision Data

567. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have been processed through direct provision since its inception; and the number who have been refused the right to remain since its inception. [36937/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The system of Direct Provision was established in 2000 when the then health boards, which were responsible for homeless people, found themselves unable to cope with a large number of individuals who were claiming asylum in Ireland.

The Direct Provision system is a whole of Government system which delivers a wide range of services to those seeking international protection in Ireland. Accommodation and related services are organised by my Department through a series of 32 accommodation centres across the country, which are under contract to the Department.

A key aspect of the Direct Provision system is that State services are provided to those in the protection process in the same manner as they are provided to Irish citizens and those legally entitled to reside here. There is no separate education system, no separate health service, no separate social protection service.

From 2000 to the end of 2016, 76,839 people applied for asylum in Ireland. It should be noted that a significant number of applicants choose not to accept the offer of full-board ac-

accommodation and choose to self support themselves or live with colleagues, family members or friends in communities across the country, as they are entitled to do. Since its inception in 2000 to the end of July 2017, 58,680 people had availed of the State accommodation system for those seeking international protection in Ireland.

Overall, from 2001 to the end of this June, the Ministerial Decisions Unit of my Department issued 50,563 asylum refusal decisions. During the same period, 10,197 asylum grant decisions were issued. In addition, a number of those applicants who were not granted asylum may have been granted subsidiary protection or leave to remain subsequent to their initial application. A breakdown of decisions between those residing in Direct Provision and outside of the system is not available.

Direct Provision Data

568. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the longest duration persons remain in direct provision. [36938/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The following table details the duration of stay by applicants in state provided accommodation at the 31st August 2017. These figures are based on latest entry into state provided accommodation.

Less than 3 years	More than 3 years and less than 5 years	More than 5 years and less than 7 years	More than 7 years
3844	541	214	208

By comparison, the statistics for the duration of stay for applicants in state provided accommodation at the end of 2016 were as follows:

Less than 3 years	More than 3 years and less than 5 years	More than 5 years and less than 7 years	More than 7 years
3410	468	239	348

It should be noted that when the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers examined the figures in 2015, there were 1,480 people in direct provision for 5 years or more. This figure is now 422 people. The vast majority of those cases that are still awaiting a final decision on their protection cannot be processed for various reasons such as pending judicial reviews. In effect, this means that all relevant people have received a first instance decision and for cases not fully resolved, there can be complex reasons why these cases have not been resolved.

The Deputy might be interested to know that information on these and other statistics on accommodation, application and other related matters are available on the website of the Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) - www.ria.gov.ie.

Direct Provision Data

569. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of direct provision centres and facilities here. [36939/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 32 accommodation

centres being operated under the direct provision system. The information requested by the Deputy in relation to details of current centre location and contractor is set out below:

Contractors for Accommodation Centres

County	Centre	Address	Contractor	State or Private-ly Owner
Clare	Knockalisheen	Meelick	Campbell Catering t/a Aramark Ireland	State
Cork	Ashbourne House	Glounthaune	Barlow Properties	Private
	Kinsale Road	Cork City	Campbell Catering t/a Aramark Ireland	State
	Glenvera	Wellington Road	Bideau Ltd	Private
	Millstreet	Millstreet	Millstreet Equestrian Services	Private
	Clonakilty Lodge	Clonakilty	D and A Limited	Private
Dublin	The Towers	Ninth Lock Road, Clondalkin	Fazyard Limited	Private
	Georgian Court	77-79 Lower Gardiner Street	Old George Ltd	Private
	Hatch Hall	28 Lower Hatch Street	East Coast Catering (Ireland)	Private
	Balseskin	St. Margarets, Finglas, Dublin 11	East Coast Catering (Ireland)	Private
	Watergate House	11-14 Usher's Quay, Dublin 8	Maison Builders Ltd	Private
Galway	Eglinton	The Proms, Salthill	Maplestar Ltd	Private
	Great Western House	Eyre Square	Shaun Hennelly	Private
Kerry	Atlas House (Killarney)	Killarney	OFM Limited	State
	Atlas House (Tralee)	Tralee	OFM Limited	State
	Johnston Marina	Tralee	OFM Limited	State
	Park Lodge	Killarney	OFM Limited	State
Kildare	Eyrepowell	Newbridge	Peachport Ltd	Private
Laois	Montague	Emo	Fazyard Ltd	Private
Limerick	Hanratty's	Glentworth Street, Limerick	Birch Rentals Ltd	Private

County	Centre	Address	Contractor	State or Private-ly Owner
	Mount Trenchard	Foynes	Baycaster Ltd	Private
Longford	Richmond Court	Richmond Street, Longford	Mint Horizon Ltd	Private
Louth	Carroll Village	Dundalk	East Coast Catering (Ireland)	Private
Mayo	The Old Convent	Ballyhaunis	Bridgestock	Private
Meath	Mosney	Mosney	Mosney PLC	Private
Monaghan	St. Patricks	Monaghan	Tattonward Ltd	Private
Sligo	Globe House	Chapel Hill	Bridgestock	Private
Waterford	Atlantic House	Tramore	Atlantic Blue Ltd	Private
	Ocean View	Tramore	Ocean View Accommodation Ltd	Private
	Birchwood	Ballytruckle Road	Stompool Ltd	Private
	Viking House	Coffee House Lane	Millstreet Equestrian Services	Private
Westmeath	Athlone	Athlone	Campbell Catering t/a Aramark Ireland	State

Since the start of 2016, 3 accommodation centres have been closed - The Staircase in Dublin, Bridgewater House in County Tipperary and Westbourne Lodge in County Limerick.

Direct Provision Data

570. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the range of ages of persons in direct provision; and the provisions that are made for their health and educational wellbeing. [36940/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Direct Provision system is a whole of Government system which delivers a wide range of State services to those seeking international protection in Ireland. These services include health services as provided by the HSE, education services as provided by primary and post-primary schools and, for adults, Education and Training Boards across the country. The Reception and Integration Agency, whose role is to oversee the provision of accommodation and ancillary services to asylum seekers, has a Health Unit, an Education Unit and a Child and Family Services Unit which can link vulnerable and at risk persons with the appropriate services. It is the role of these units to act as conduits between residents, staff at accommodation centres, state agencies(including TUSLA and the HSE) and local schools.

The age breakdown of persons in direct provision accommodation is as follows:

Age	Females	Males	Totals
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0 - 4 years	216	255	471
5 - 12 years	275	292	567
13 - 17 years	87	101	188
18 - 25 years	254	463	717
26 - 35 years	586	960	1546
36 - 45 years	347	583	930
46 - 55 years	101	181	282
66+ years	14	12	26
Totals	1927	2880	4807

Departmental Staff Data

571. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36957/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of political staff employed in my Department and the number of civil servants in Ministerial offices is set out in tabular form as requested. It should be noted that under the arrangements for the 32nd Dáil, information regarding the employment of Parliamentary Assistants and Secretarial Assistants is a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Arrangements for the staffing of Ministerial offices in my Department since 2015 have been in line with the relevant Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines and Government Decision for the 31st and 32nd Dáil respectively. The table refers to the staffing levels for the Tánaiste and former Minister Frances Fitzgerald, the offices of former Minister of State, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, current Minister of State David Stanton and of course, my own office.

Mr. Pat Breen TD. is the Minister for State for Data Protection at my Department and the Department of the Taoiseach. He is also Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Employment and Social Protection with special responsibility for Trade, Employment Business and the EU Digital Market.

Mr. Finian McGrath T.D is the Minister of State with my Department with special responsibility for Disability issues. He is also Minister of State at the Departments of Social Protection and Health.

The staffing arrangements in respect of both Minister of State Breen (and his predecessor Minister of State Dara Murphy) and Minister of State McGrath are the responsibility of their respective parent Departments.

In addition to the political staff employed in my Department both the Minister and Minister of State have a serving civil servant assigned to each of them as a private secretary. These staff are not seconded to our offices but are assigned, along with other civil servants, as part of the Corporate Services function to the Ministerial offices to undertake the administrative duties in those offices and the numbers fall within the arrangements referred to earlier.

Staffing as of January 2015 Frances Fitzgerald T.D. (31st Dáil

Post	Salary Scale
Special Advisor (100%)	PO Standard Scale (Non-PPC)
Special Advisor (50%)	PO Standard Scale (PPC)
Special Advisor (50%)	PO Standard Scale (PPC)
Personal Secretary (100%)	Personal Secretary Scale (PPC)
Personal Secretary (100%)	Personal Secretary Scale (PPC)
Personal Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale (PPC)

Staffing as of January 2015 Aodhán Ó Riordáin (31st Dáil)

Post	Salary Scale
Personal Assistant (100%)	Personal Assistant Scale (PPC)
Personal Secretary (100%)	Personal Secretary Scale (PPC)
Civilian Driver (50%)	Civilian Driver Scale (PPC)
Civilian Driver (50%)	Civilian Driver Scale (PPC)

Staffing as of May 2016 Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald T.D, (32nd Dáil)*

Post	Salary Scale
Special Advisor (100%)	PO Higher Scale (Non-PPC)
Special Advisor (100%)	PO Standard Scale (PPC)
Special Advisor (100%)	PO Standard Scale (PPC)

* Specific sanction for an additional Special Advisor post was received in light of Minister Fitzgerald's appointment as Tánaiste

Minister of State at Department of Justice & Equality David Stanton August 2017

Post	Salary Scale
Civilian Driver (50%)	Civilian Driver Scale (PPC)
Civilian Driver (50%)	Civilian Driver Scale (PPC)

Minister for Justice & Equality Charlie Flanagan August 2017

Post	Salary Scale
Special Advisor	PO Standard Scale (PPC)
Special Advisor	PO Standard Scale (PPC)

*Two Garda Drivers are assigned to the Minister for Justice and Equality and are staff of An Garda Síochána

Leave to Remain

572. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding direct provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37051/17]

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 has been granted leave to remain in the State for the period to 6 September 2018. This decision was conveyed in writing to the person concerned by letter dated 7 September 2017.

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.

Departmental Staff Data

573. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37074/17]

574. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of men and women respectively in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [37085/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 573 and 574 together.

I can inform the Deputy that there are 1,376 females officers and 947 male officers employed in my Department as of 21 August 2017.

As requested, the table below outlines the breakdown of staff at the grades (including analogous grades) of APO and above in my Department:

Salary Grade	Gender	Number
Secretary General	1 Male	1
Deputy Secretary General	2 Female 1 Male	3
Assistant Secretary	5 Female 9 Male	14
Principal Officer	31 Female 56 Male	87
Assistant Principal Officer	151 Female 126 Male	277

Residency Permits

575. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status of a family (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37089/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications will be processed, as part of a single application procedure, by a new International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) from that date.

The staff of that Office (the Chief International Protection Officer and International Protection Officers) are also independent in the performance of their protection functions.

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

For your information, 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 on 27 February 2017 which is available on the website of the International Protection Office (www.ipd.gov.ie).

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service Administration

576. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will ensure the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) is properly resourced to enable it to process applications in a timely fashion; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some units in INIS currently have year long processing backlogs (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the distress caused by such delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37114/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Staff of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department are deployed across a wide range of activities including the broad areas of international protection and immigration processing, visa processing, citizenship, border management and policy areas of the organisation. In that context, the management of resources is kept under constant review having regard to business and operational requirements, and staff are deployed accordingly.

While INIS endeavours to have applications processed as quickly as possible, processing times may vary based on a number of factors such as the number of applications on hands, individual circumstances, the complexity of applications, whether further information is required, and the resources available. In that regard I should mention that applications across almost all of the main INIS processing areas continue to increase and this does present challenges for service delivery.

With regard to the application type referred to by the Deputy, I am informed that in many cases processing delays are usually associated with the need for additional documentation or where a detailed assessment of a case is required. I can also advise the Deputy that the practices and procedures have been and continue to be reviewed in order to reduce the time it takes to process an application, e.g. the introduction of new application forms and explanatory leaflets.

Immigration Status

577. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding a proposal to remove a person (details supplied) from the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37144/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was refused permission to remain in the state on the basis of his marriage to an EU Citizen.

On 18 April 2016, the person concerned was issued with a proposal to make a removal order in respect of him in accordance with the European Communities (Free Movement of persons) Regulations.

The person concerned, through his legal representative, submitted representations in accordance with Regulation 20 of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regula-

tions 2015. This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so.

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

578. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37145/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the person concerned applied to EU Treaty Rights Unit to be treated as a Permitted Family Member of an EU Citizen based on their relationship to an EU Citizen on 1 November 2016.

Following a consideration of the file, the application was refused on 10 July 2017 as they had failed to meet the criteria laid out under the Free Movement of Persons Regulations 2015.

The person concerned requested a review of the decision on 28 July 2017 and this application is currently being processed. This review will be considered in due course.

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

579. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide a letter to a person (details supplied) which states that they are seeking asylum here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37171/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a letter was issued to the person concerned on 11 August 2017 in relation to the renewal of their leave to remain.

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.

Fines Administration

580. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will authorise an independent audit of the prison system relative to the methodology used to calculate fines and warrants for prisoners who had served time in prison and were being released on payment of the fine imposed; the number of prisoners that were overcharged in the past due to the wrong calculation being made; the amount of overpayment in each case; if the overpayments in question will be refunded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37173/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As outlined in response to Parliamentary No. 274 of 4 July, 2017, I am informed by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) that in 2016, 8,439 persons were committed to prison arising from non-payment of fines. For operational and capacity reasons, each person committed to prison for non-payment of fines is considered for temporary release (TR) in line with the Criminal Justice Act 1960, as amended. Factors considered in relation to this TR include the nature of the crime giving rise to the committal, the person's criminal history (if any) and the accommodation capacity of individual prisons on the day.

For approximately 30 years prior to its cessation in 2010, it was a practice that persons committed to prison for non-payment of a fine could be released early upon payment of a portion of that fine. Broadly speaking, the matter of who was recommended to the Minister for temporary release in these circumstances was subject to the discretion of the Governor concerned and on the particular circumstances of the case. There was no standard approach to the operation of the system. The legislative basis relied upon for this was the Criminal Justice Act 1951, which allowed the Minister to mitigate punitive elements of a sentence handed down by the Courts. In 2010, the Irish Prison Service ended the practice of the granting of TR based on the payment or part payment of a fine imposed by the Courts based solely on the individual discretion of the prison Governor concerned.

Since 2010, persons sentenced to prison for non-payment of fines have had a number of options open to them, viz: (i) pay the fine in full; (ii) serve the sentence in full; (iii) be granted release only when the fine has been paid in full, through a combination of part payment of the fine and serving of the sentence imposed or (iv) be granted TR for operational reasons as outlined earlier - for example accommodation capacity in the prison.

In relation to option (iii), the IPS has standardised the system whereby a prisoner can be released early through a combination of part serving of the sentence and payment of a portion of the fine. The system is now estate-wide, automated and based on a standardised sliding scale. For example, setting aside the issue of remission, in circumstances where two days into a four-day sentence a prisoner seeks to pay a fine, he will be advised that as 50% of the sentence has been served, only 50% of the fine remains to be paid. The 'sliding scale' methodology used to determine how much of a fine can be considered 'paid' when a portion of the sentence has been served operates uniformly throughout the entire prison system and dispenses with the element of individual governor discretion practised prior to 2010. All monies collected as a result of fines paid by prisoners is lodged into an Imprest Account, is properly accounted for and then transferred to the Courts Service. In 2016 the amount involved was €29,864.72.

Needless to say, the extent of the original fine imposed is entirely a matter for the Courts and cannot be altered by the IPS. The IPS informs me that it is not aware that any prisoner or ex-prisoner is seeking a refund on the basis that the amount they paid on the sliding scale system explained above exceeded the fine determined by a Court. The issue of refunds therefore does not arise.

The IPS advise that, regardless of the fact that no-one has sought a refund, it has no information itself that any prisoner was overcharged on the system described above. This could only

be definitively established if the individual file of every prisoner ever committed to prison on a fine, was manually checked to establish the amount of the fine imposed, the portion paid and the length of sentence served, in order to check whether any calculation error had ever occurred. For obvious reasons, this is impractical.

Due to the large volume of fines cases committed to prison on a yearly basis, any audit of the system would be a significant undertaking. With the lack of any specific evidence that persons were overcharged, I do not believe that an independent audit of the system is justified at this time.

Finally, I should mention that since the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery) 2014 Act on 11 January 2016, where fines remain unpaid by the due date, the fined persons must be notified to return to court to enable the Judge to impose whatever sanction the court considers appropriate in default of payment. The options available to the Judge are as follows: attachment of earnings; recovery order; community service; or, if none of these options are appropriate, imprisonment.

Office of Public Works Properties

581. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the carpark at the new courthouse in Drogheda will be available to the public on non-sitting days; the terms of agreement on the car park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37175/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions. However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and I am advised that there is no public parking available in front of the courthouse but on-street parking is available nearby and also car parks are available in the town. The Courts Service has informed me that the site in front of Drogheda Courthouse, which was provided by the Office of Public Works to the Courts Service to facilitate the construction of the new Courthouse, is in the process of being transferred back to the Office of Public Works. It is believed that the Office of Public Works will be entering into discussions with the Local Authority with a view to determining the future use of this area.

Immigration Status

582. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a stamp 4 application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37181/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it has received a request for permission to remain in the State in respect of the person mentioned by the Deputy. This case is among a number of such cases that are currently being held by this Department. Consideration of this case is pending the outcome of the appeal to the Supreme Court of the Court of Appeal judgment in the *Luximon v. Minister for Justice and Equality*.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS of my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be

obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Residency Permits

583. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status with particular reference to stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37182/17]

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.

Visa Applications

584. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will reconsider a visa application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37183/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was refused a long-stay Join Family Visa on 3 October 2016, and was informed of their right to appeal the decision within 2 months.

I understand no appeal was submitted and no further applications have been made. If a new application is made, the applicant should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to them and be in a position to address them in any subsequent application.

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.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to visamail@justice.ie.

Residency Permits

585. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37184/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service of my Department that the person concerned was approved for a Residence Card as a family member of an EU Citizen on 30 November 2011.

The Residence Card of the person concerned was subsequently revoked on 18 October 2016 as the EU Citizen had not resided in the State nor exercised rights in the State since 2014.

The person concerned requested a review of that decision on 08 November 2016 and this application is currently being processed. This review will be considered in due course.

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

Residency Permits

586. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and when a decision will be reached in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37185/17]

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 11th March 2005 following a comprehensive and thorough examination of her asylum claim and a detailed examination of the representations they submitted for consideration under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended)

The person concerned, through her legal representative, has made a request to have that Deportation Order revoked, based on the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as it is possible to do so. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order.

The person again, through their legal representative, has also sought to be re-admitted to the asylum/protection process, pursuant to the provisions of Section 17 (7) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) and the initial decision in this regard is currently under review. Once a final decision has been arrived at, it will be notified in writing. The Deputy might wish to note that the resulting decision in this instance will be to re-admit, or refuse to re-admit, the person concerned to the asylum/protection process.

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

Visa Applications

587. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will reconsider a visa refusal to facilitate a family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37186/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused on 6 February 2017. An appeal was subsequently made against this decision, and refused on 26 July 2017. This decision was communicated to the applicant.

No further applications have been made. If one is made, the applicant should bear in mind the original refusal reasons communicated to them and be in a position to address them.

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 INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS (visamail@justice.ie).

Garda Expenditure

588. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if public moneys were used to purchase a boat (details supplied) for use by the Garda sea angling club; and the total sum of such public moneys expended on same. [37203/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Sea Angling Club is a private club and that no public moneys were used for the purpose of the purchase of a boat by the Club.

Departmental Expenditure

589. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37227/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department provides a Financial Shared Service to 10 client bodies. This results in higher volumes of banking charges which are currently absorbed by the Department.

Bank charges have increased in 2017 due primarily to the introduction of charges by the Bank of Ireland in relation to Government bank accounts. The Deputy may wish to note that the Office of Government Procurement is currently undertaking a tendering process to procure a new banking service for Government Departments and Offices. I understand it is intended that this new banking service will be in place in early 2018.

The payments relating to banking charges and credit card fees over the past 5 years are as

follows:

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 to date
Banking Fees	€	€	€	€	€
AIB	10,327	9,427	6,384	5,669	2,060
Bank of Ireland	51	54	67	88	11,570
Credit Card Fees					
AIB	857	457	257	419	219

Ministerial Appointments

590. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a county registrar will be appointed in County Westmeath; and if the person appointed will deal only with County Westmeath. [37233/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware, that I approved a proposal to fill the County Registrar vacancy in County Westmeath and that one County Registrar would be appointed to cover both Meath and Westmeath. A recruitment competition was conducted by the Public Appointments Service and it subsequently identified persons for recommendation to Government for appointment as County Registrar for Meath and Westmeath. The Government has made its decision and I understand that the person concerned is due to commence in the role shortly.

Visa Applications

591. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an application for a visa can be reviewed and processed as appropriate in the case of a person (details supplied); the next steps in this application to be undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37298/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Further to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 152 of 29 June 2017, I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Join Family visa application referred to by the Deputy was received on 21 August 2017.

While every effort is made to process these applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume and complexity of applications, the possible need for the Visa Office to investigate, enquire into, or seek further information in relation to certain applications, and the resources available. As such applications are processed in chronological order (i.e. based on date order of receipt), it is not possible at this time to give a definitive date as to when this application will be finalised.

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.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to visamail@justice.ie.

Garda Station Opening Hours

592. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the opening hours of a Garda station (details supplied) have been reduced; the number of personnel there are at present; the hours they operate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37309/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for operational decisions in respect of the the effective and efficient use of resources available to An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no role in relation to the matter.

In this context, I understand that Garda management keeps under review the overall policing arrangements, including the operation of Garda stations and assignment of personnel, throughout the State having regard to, for example, crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level.

This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources and that the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that, as at 31 July 2017, the latest date for which information is available, there are some 18 members assigned to Ballyconnell Garda Station: 15 Gardaí and 3 Sergeants. I am also informed that, with effect from Monday, 24 July, 2017, Ballyconnell Garda station is open to members of the public between 9am and 9pm, with high-visibility operational policing patrols conducted throughout the Garda District outside of those hours.

When the public office of the station is not open to members of the public, personal callers are referred to Cavan Garda Station, which operates 24-hours a day. In addition, telephone calls received outside of opening hours are automatically transferred to Cavan Garda station.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner that, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 400 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow for the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including Cavan/Monaghan, in the coming years.

Garda Strength

593. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the manning levels as of 1 September 2017 in all Garda stations in counties Kildare, Laois and Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37385/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. Furthermore when allocations are taking place comprehensive consultation is carried out with local management during which all factors are taken into consideration. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Kildare Division on the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 342 with 20 Garda Reserves and 30 civilians. The number of Gardaí assigned to the Laois/Offaly Division was 323 with 17 Garda Reserves and 24 civilians. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána, 60 of whom have been assigned to the Kildare Division, and 56 has been assigned to the Laois/Offaly Division. I am also informed that a further 400 Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Kildare Division and the Laois/Offaly Division in the coming years.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of the Kildare Division and the Laois

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/ Offaly Division on 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set out in the following table.

KILDARE DIVISION 31 JULY 2017

DISTRICT	STATION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	TOTAL
KILDARE	ATHY	24	3	1				28
	CASTLE- DERMOT	3	1					4
	KILDARE	28	7	1	1			37
	MONAS- TEREVIN	4	1					5
	NEW- BRIDGE	40	6					46
	RATHAN- GAN	2	1					3
	TOTAL	101	19	2	1			123
LEIXLIP	CARBURY	6	2					8
	CEL- BRIDGE	9	1					10
	KILCOCK	10						10
	LEIXLIP	47	8	2	1			58
	MAY- NOOTH	11	1					12
	TOTAL	83	12	2	1			98
NAAS	CLANE	6	1					7
	KILCUL- LEN	1	1					2
	NAAS	92	14	2	1	1		110
	ROBERT- STOWN	2						2
	TOTAL	101	16	2	1	1		121
KILDARE Total		285	47	6	3	1		342

LAOIS/OFFALY DIVISION 31 JULY 2017

DISTRICT	STATION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	TOTAL
BIRR	BANAGHER	4	1					5
	BIRR	25	6		1			32
	CLOGHAN	1						1
	FERBANE	3	1					4
	KILCOR- MAC	2						2
	KINNITTY	1						1
	SHINRONE	1						1
	TOTAL	37	8		1			46
PORTLAO- ISE	ABBEYLEIX	15	6					21
	ARLES	1						1
	BAL- LYLINAN	2						2

	BORRIS-IN-OSSORY	1					1
	CLON-ASLEE	1					1
	DURROW	1					1
	MOUNT-MELICK	4	1				5
	MOUN-TRATH	2	1				3
	PORTAR-LINGTON	11	3				14
	PORTLAO-ISE	107	16	6		1	130
	RATHD-OWNEY	2					2
	STRADBALLY	2					2
	TOTAL	149	27	6		1	183
TUL-LAMORE	CLARA	4	1				5
	DAINGEAN	2					2
	EDENDER-RY	10	2				12
	RHODE	1					1
	TUL-LAMORE	62	9	2	1		74
	TOTAL	79	12	2	1		94
LAOIS/OFFALY Total		265	47	8	2	1	323

Garda Deployment

594. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí allocated to stations in counties Kildare, Laois and Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37386/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda units and Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that as of the 31 July 2017, there were 342 and 323 Gardaí attached to the Kildare and Laois/Offaly Divisions respectively. There are also 20 Garda Reserves and 30 civilians attached to the Kildare Division with 17 Reserves and 24 civilians to the Laois/Offaly Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance

to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 400 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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

I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the number of Community Gardaí allocated to the stations concerned and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

It is, of course the case that all Gardaí, not simply designated Community Gardaí have a role to play in addressing community policing issues as and when the need arises and, in that sense, community policing involves far more than a single unit within An Garda Síochána.

Direct Provision System

595. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will respond to correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding direct provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37469/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Supreme Court judgment in *N.V.H. v. The Minister for Justice and Equality* is an important judgment, and its full implications are being examined carefully. The Court itself recognises the complexities around this issue in that it acknowledges the Executive function in not only controlling who should enter the State but also to regulate the activities of non-citizens while in the State and has had to consider the distinctions of rights between citizens and non-citizens in the context of Article 40.1 of the Constitution. It has concluded that in an international protection system with no temporal limit on the decision making process, an absolute prohibition on the right to work is contrary to the right to seek employment under the Constitution. The Court recognises that this is a matter for the Executive and Legislature to consider and accordingly has adjourned

consideration of the Order the Court should make for a period of six months. The State will make submissions to the Court in relation to the format of the order the Court is to make at the appropriate time. In the interim, the legal status as regards access to the labour market for international protection applicants remains unchanged, as set out in Section 16(3)(b) of the International Protection Act 2015.

One of the principal aims of the International Protection Act 2015, which was commenced at the end of last year, is to process cases as quickly as possible so that in due course as cases on hand are cleared, persons in need of international protection are granted status quickly, thereby giving them an automatic right to work. In many EU Member States, the right to work is not an unfettered right, often arising after a particular period of time - usually 9 months to a year - and in many instances may be limited to particular job categories the withdrawal of other financial supports, etc. All of these matters require careful consideration as to their impact and to reflect the existing requirements placed on those who come to Ireland as lawful economic migrants.

The judgment has significant legal, economic, policy and operational considerations, many of which impact across a range of Government Departments and services. For this reason, a whole of Government approach has been adopted to examine the implications of the judgment and to propose appropriate solutions as quickly as possible. Following the approval of Government, I have established an inter-Departmental Taskforce to undertake this important work. The work of the Taskforce is ongoing. It will report to Government with the outcome of its deliberations in due course.

Garda Recruitment

596. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his Department's recruitment policy for allowing members of the transgender and LGBT communities to enlist in An Garda Síochána. [37496/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Recruitment to An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013. Any person, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender, who is interested in becoming a member of An Garda Síochána, is entitled to apply to a recruitment competition provided they meet the eligibility requirements.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial recruitment stages for selection of Garda trainees and I, as Minister, have no direct involvement in the matter. As a public body established under the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act, 2004, PAS is obliged under section 34(1)(b) of that Act to ensure that "*standards of probity, merit, equity and fairness*" apply to all of its recruitment and selection work. Recruitment competitions organised by An Garda Síochána are also, of course, subject to compliance with the *Code of Practice for Appointment to Positions where the Garda Commissioner has Statutory Responsibility*, as published by the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA). The Code requires adherence to the recruitment principles of probity, merit, best practice, fairness and transparency. Compliance with the Code is subject to audit by the CPSA.

Residency Permits

597. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if persons (details supplied) are allowed to leave the State for a holiday in the 12 months prior to applying

for residency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37537/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is governed by the provisions of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. 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, including residency requirements, prescribed in the Act.

Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website contains the current version of the application by a person of full age for naturalisation as an Irish citizen and an on-line naturalisation residency calculator which individuals may find of assistance in establishing if the residency requirements are met.

Where an applicant is found to be non-resident for substantial periods of time such periods will not be reckonable for the purposes of satisfying the statutory residency conditions for naturalisation stipulated in the Act. This is of particular importance with regard to the requirement to have 1 year's continuous residence in the State immediately prior to the date of application, and may also mean the requirement of total residence is not met. The guidance notes attached to the application form inform applicants that arrangements for assessment of residence are on the basis that the person is physically resident in the State for the required period of time and that where there are significant absences from the State the application may be refused. A reasonable and generous period of up to 6 weeks is allowed to provide for absences from the State for normal holidays and other short term and temporary nature absences, such as for a family bereavement.

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.

Prisoner Transfers

598. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of successful applications under the transfer of prisoners legislation for persons wishing to transfer from prisons abroad or in Northern Ireland to this jurisdiction in each of the years since its inception to 2014; the number of applications received since 2014 which have not been processed due to the Supreme Court decision of 2014; the reason for the delay in amending the legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37562/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Transfer of Sentenced Persons Act Annual Report is laid before the Oireachtas in April every year and includes the historical statistical information requested by the Deputy. The report is also available on the Department of Justice & Equality website. (www.justice.ie)

The Supreme Court judgement in the case of O'Farrell, McDonald, Rafferty -v-The Governor of Portlaoise Prison is detailed and has implications for the continuance in its present form of the process operated by the Irish Prison Service for transferring prisoners from other States to Ireland. The practical effect of this judgement and whether it will necessitate legislative and/or administrative changes is being examined by officials of the Irish Prison Service and my Department in consultation with Attorney General. Given the complex nature of the review being

undertaken, it is not possible at this stage to indicate a time frame for its conclusion.

I am advised by my officials in the Irish Prison Service that there are 32 applications received from prisoners overseas which are currently 'on hold' pending the receipt of the necessary legal advices.

Asylum Support Services

599. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views regarding the measures advocated by the safe passage campaign (details supplied) which seeks to reunite separated refugee families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37569/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In 2014, before the migrant crisis escalated, a Syrian Humanitarian Admissions Programme (SHAP) was introduced, subject to certain conditions being met. This was replaced in 2015 with the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), which allows for Syrians and other vulnerable nationalities to benefit from resettlement and relocation schemes, and offers them protection in Ireland in their own right. This is a much improved programme allowing many vulnerable people to benefit from protection here. To date, 1,244 refugees and asylum seekers have been admitted to Ireland under these programmes. An additional 541 asylum seekers will be relocated from Greece by the end of the year. We will also working on the resettlement in the coming months of an additional 255 programme refugees from UNCHR camps in Lebanon.

I am not of the view that the best solution to this crisis is to increase the number of programmes and all the administrative and legal complexities that go with them. My emphasis is to concentrate on the number of people arriving in Ireland under the programmes currently in place. I am satisfied that we are making good progress now and that there is capacity to ensure more vulnerable people can come to Ireland under these programmes in the period ahead. All of our focus needs to be on these objectives. I would encourage all community groups and individuals to continue to make contact with offers of support to the Irish Red Cross and the Irish Refugee Protection Programme - these will be followed up and assessed promptly and can directly benefit the increased numbers of people we have committed to welcoming to Ireland this year.

Significant resources are being invested in these humanitarian efforts through the offices of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme and the International Protection Office. As a result we have developed mechanisms and associated expertise to deal with resettlement and relocation. Our response to the migrant crisis in terms of accepting refugees is through the IRPP and all available resources are being directed to that Programme in order to meet the commitment entered into. It is essential that we continue our efforts to complete the IRPP successfully before we look to apply the learning from this Programme to deliberations with regards to any future refugee intake. Decisions taken at EU level with regard to the ongoing migration crisis will of course impact on any such deliberations.

In relation to family reunification, existing avenues for the admission of more extended family members are already available under the provisions of the INIS Non-EEA Policy Document on Family Reunification, which allows beneficiaries of international protection, including those admitted under the IRPP, and other Non-EEA migrants residing lawfully in Ireland to make an application. As Minister, I can and do apply my discretion as regards the economic conditions for sponsors set down in the Policy Document. Such applications on humanitarian grounds are examined on a case-by-case basis and I expect this practice to continue.

Garda Operations

600. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and civilian staff assigned to and working with the Garda special crime task force when it was first set up; the number of gardaí and civilian staff now assigned to and working with the taskforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37579/17]

610. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Garda special crime task force; the number of gardaí in the taskforce when it was originally set up; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37777/17]

670. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí allocated to each Garda Special Crime Task Force in each of the past five years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38645/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 600, 610 and 670 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources among the various Garda Divisions and Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed.

As part of the range of measures which have been put in place to tackle organised crime a new Garda Special Crime Task Force (SCTF) has been in operation in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) since July 2016 and is focussing relentlessly on persons involved in organised criminal activities. It operates in cooperation with other agencies including the Revenue Commissioners and Department of Social Protection and has the benefit of the expertise of members of the Criminal Assets Bureau, Garda Divisional Asset Profilers, and the Garda Síochána Analysis Service. It is under the direction of Detective Chief Superintendent, Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (DOCB) under the remit of Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations.

I am informed that the SCTF initially comprised 6 Sergeants and 30 Gardaí, with 1 Sergeant and 5 Gardaí seconded from each of the Divisions in the DMR. There are currently 5 Sergeants and 45 Gardaí assigned to the SCTF.

I am further informed that the SCTF has led significant and high profile operations and arrests associated with seizures of firearms, drugs, explosives and significant financial assets. In addition, critical intelligence led operations and investigations were implemented to ensure the preservation of life within the DMR. The SCTF has repeatedly proven its resilience and capacity for deployment and is ideally placed for redeployment to any Regional policing priority which may emerge.

The current threat level arising from organised crime groups in the DMR has not dissipated, although it has been significantly impeded. The consistent targeting of these sophisticated groups is essential to dismantle them, ensuring safe communities and a strong policing capacity.

I am advised by the Commissioner that a competition to fill vacancies for Sergeants and Gardaí at the Units comprising Special Crime Operations was completed at the end of 2016 and additional Sergeants and Gardaí are being allocated to these Units, including the DOCB, incorporating the SCTF, on a phased basis, most recently in August, with a further tranche following the next attestation of new Gardaí to take place later this year. The capacity of Garda manage-

ment to allocate additional resources to specialist units is a result of the significant investment in personnel to which the Government is committed under its Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána. In relation to civilian staff I am advised by the Commissioner that the appointment of professional / expert non-Garda personnel to positions within Special Crime Operations is being examined in the context of the extensive reform programme underway within An Garda Síochána.

Crime Data

601. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the joint agency response to crime announced in 2015 to bring Gardaí, the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service together to target repeat offenders with diversion programmes in order to stop reoffending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37594/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Joint Agency Response to Crime (J-ARC) is a joint strategy between An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, Irish Prison Service and my Department with a joint objective of targeting the 25% of recidivists who are responsible for 75% of crime; to manage nominated prolific offenders in order to reduce crime and; enhance public safety by strengthening the co-ordination and integration of policy, practice and research between these organisations. J-ARC is a strategic response to the management of prioritised prolific offenders whereby a number of pilot initiatives have been developed to address their behaviour and reduce crime. J-ARC (for adult offenders) is operating under four inter-agency initiatives in Dublin and this has been extended to three additional areas i.e. Dundalk, Waterford and Limerick.

The J-ARC strategy:

- develops and further strengthens a multi agency approach to the management of crime;
- prioritises offenders in order to develop initiatives which will address their behaviour; and
- aims to reduce crime and increase public safety in local communities.

A number of joint agency operational initiatives, outlined below, have been established on a pilot basis under the strategy, the aims of which are to ensure an enhancement of communication between agencies and the alignment of offender-management processes currently in operation, with a view to reducing the level of crime committed by the individuals concerned.

(i) ACER 3

ACER 3 is being piloted in two Garda Districts within the Dublin Metropolitan Region and is a multi-agency approach to the management of identified offenders charged with burglary. It provides an operational approach for co-ordinated and enhanced levels of co-operation and co-ordination between An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service. It places the offender at the centre of the process and identifies his/her needs, strengths and risk; and provides an interagency co-operation and co-ordinated response in addressing those needs and risks.

ACER 3 has also recently been extended to three additional areas i.e. Dundalk, Waterford and Limerick.

(ii) STRIVE Ballymun

This initiative in Ballymun targets those causing a high level of harm or disruption. The

purpose of the initiative is to motivate those persons to desist from crime and have their identified needs addressed by local agencies or for a multi-agency intervention to be put in place to disrupt the individual's criminal lifestyle. In addition, support measures and mechanisms are in place, by agencies within the community, for people connected with the offenders, i.e. families/siblings of offenders, those dependent on drugs/alcohol etc.

It is anticipated this initiative will facilitate the community in developing to be a more positive environment in which to live.

(iii) The Bridge Project - Change Works Programme

This Project is a company, limited by guarantee, which has worked with high-risk offenders for over 20 years and is funded through the Probation Service and the CDETB.

The Bridge Project has initiated the 'Change Works' Programme, targeting violent offenders who have been assessed as 'likely to cause serious harm' and aims to reduce the frequency and seriousness of offences committed by the target group.

The Project is Dublin-based and is fully aligned to Garda Case management, Probation Case Management, Integrated Sentence Management and Community Return. This initiative has a full-time, co-located, probation team and is initially planned to be 18-24 months in duration.

In 2017, J-ARC was extended to manage and address the criminal behaviour of nominated young people aged 16 to 21 years old which resulted in the inclusion of the Departments of Health; Children & Youth Affairs; and Education & Skills, as well as Tusla.

Youth Joint Agency Response to Crime Initiative (Y J-ARC)

Y J-ARC is the latest initiative under the Joint Agencies Response to Crime initiative. It was launched in 2017 and targets young people aged 16 to 21 years who are the most prolific in their offending. It provides an operational approach for co-ordinated and enhanced levels of co-operation between the Probation Service, An Garda Síochána, Irish Prison Service, Irish Youth Justice Service (Oberstown campus), Tusla and the Department of Education and Skills. It places the young person at the centre of the process and identifies his/her needs, strengths and risk; and provides an interagency co-operation and a co-ordinated response in addressing those needs and risks.

There are two pilot locations - Cork (Gurranabraher and Mayfield) and Blanchardstown, Dublin. Although at an early stage of development, it is anticipated that this multi-agency approach in working with young people, their families and their communities will be beneficial in addressing the risk, needs and strengths of the young people involved and in promoting safer communities.

J-ARC forms a key part of the first Joint Strategy on Offender Management agreed between my Department, An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service which is operating since September 2016. The Joint Strategy recognises that, in order to protect the public and reduce victimisation in Irish society, a joined-up approach to the management of offenders is essential. The Strategy sets out a range of agreed key objectives and supporting actions for the enhanced management of offenders, to be advanced on an inter-agency basis in the period 2016-2018.

The ACER 3, Bridge and Strive projects are in an evaluation process at present and more detailed information on the effectiveness of those projects should be available following the conclusion of that process.

Prison Service

602. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views regarding the concerns and suggested actions of the UN committee against torture regarding the systemic deficiencies in the health care service within the prison system, and the need to undertake an independent review of the prison health care system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37611/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Prison Service acknowledges the concluding observations of the United Nations Committee against Torture [UNCAT] on the second periodic review of Ireland, which was adopted by the Committee recently. The Irish Prison Service has noted in particular, the Committee's observation [16(i)] that it should:

‘urgently undertake a fundamental review of the entire prison health care system, in keeping with the recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT);’

In this regard, the Irish Prison Service recognises that the appointment of an Executive Clinical Lead is central to addressing the prison healthcare deficits identified in the CPT 2014 Report. The Irish Prison Service is currently making arrangements for the recruitment of an Executive Clinical Lead.

When appointed, the Executive Clinical Lead will have responsibility for the management of prison healthcare services and will be central to the undertaking of a comprehensive review of those services. The Terms of Reference for this review are to be agreed by the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Health once the the Executive Clinical Lead is in place.

UN Committees

603. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views regarding observations of the UN committee against torture in relation to the death of a person (details supplied); the steps he is taking to ensure appropriate mental health care for prisoners with mental disorders and psycho-socio disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37612/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Prison Service has acknowledged the observations of the UN Committee against Torture in relation to the death of the person referred to by the Deputy. It has confirmed that significant progress has been made to date in addressing the issues and actions arising from the Commission of Investigation into the death of that person.

I have been advised by the Irish Prison Service that in-reach mental health services are available in the Dublin and Portlaoise prisons, and Castlerea prison, through collaboration with the Health Service Executive and the National Forensic Mental Health Service [NFMHS] to provide forensic mental health sessions weekly in these prisons. The Health Service Executive, provides specialist In-reach, Psychiatric services to those in custody in Limerick and Cork prisons. The Irish Prison Service has access to a limited number of places in the Central Mental Hospital for prisoners who require residential mental health treatment. There is currently an average of 20 prisoners each week awaiting transfer to the Central Mental Hospital, and the NFMHS has acknowledged the challenge of access for prisoners to in-patient treatment beds.

It is anticipated that the opening of the new Central Mental Hospital in 2020 will help address capacity issues for prisoners in need of in-patient treatment.

The Health Service Executive has confirmed that approval has been granted for the appointment of a consultant led team to both Limerick and Cork prisons. The Health Service Executive has also advised that arrangements are being finalised for the assignment of a consultant led mental health in-reach team to Castlerea Prison. The National Forensic Mental Health Service also provides an assessment and liaison service for all other prisons where a prisoner requires a forensic assessment, or access to an admission bed in the Central Mental Hospital. Consultant Forensic Psychiatrists are leading these services and can be supported by Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors, Community Psychiatric Nurses, and Social Workers.

The Irish Prison Service, in collaboration with the National Forensic Mental Health Service, has established two dedicated areas where high support is provided to vulnerable prisoners with mental illness; D2 wing in Cloverhill Prison (for remand prisoners), and the High Support Unit in Mountjoy (for sentenced prisoners). Both units provide a dedicated area within the prison where mentally ill and vulnerable prisoners, who present with a risk of harm to self or to others, can be separated from the general prison population and closely monitored in a safer environment. A Psychiatric In-reach and Court Liaison Service is delivered by the Health Service Executive/NFMHS at Cloverhill Prison. The diversion service ensures, as far as possible, that those people presenting before the courts, or indeed at an earlier stage of the criminal justice system where the infraction is a reflection of an underlying mental illness, are referred and treated appropriately. This approach has reduced the number of mentally ill people committed to prison.

The Irish Prison Service has developed a bespoke mental health training programme for staff, which is currently being delivered to all staff. In addition, all persons in custody in closed prisons have access to the Samaritans Listeners Scheme.

The IPS Psychology Service plays a key role in the provision of mental health services for people in custody. In conjunction with the multi-disciplinary team the Psychology Service provides various evidence-based primary, secondary and tertiary care talking therapies for people in custody who experience mental health difficulties.

The Irish Prison Service is in the process of further developing the Psychology Service in order to better meet the mental health needs of those in custody.

Court Orders

604. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the order of the district court ordinary decree of 26 October 2016 (details supplied) has not been executed or acted upon; and in view of this delay if he will ensure that this matter is brought to finality. [37615/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, Sheriffs (or County Registrars acting as Sheriffs) are officers of the court and are independent in the exercise of their functions and duties under statute and rules of court. The Sheriff (or County Registrar acting as Sheriff) is responsible to the Court for the Enforcement of the Court Orders. The law and procedures governing the execution of Court Orders is contained in the Enforcement of Court Orders Acts, 1926 to 1940 and the Rules of Court made thereunder, and I wish to inform the Deputy that I have no operational function in this matter.

Garda Recruitment

605. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits assigned to each Garda division since recruitment resumed in Templemore in 2014, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37654/17]

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

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 400 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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

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

DIVISION	ALLOCATIONS SINCE 2014
D.M.R. EAST	52
D.M.R. NORTH	90
D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL	108

D.M.R. SOUTH	96
D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL	106
D.M.R. WEST	103
KILDARE	60
LAOIS / OFFALY	56
MEATH	36
WESTMEATH	27
WICKLOW	18
CAVAN / MONAGHAN	26
DONEGAL	22
LOUTH	59
SLIGO / LEITRIM	13
KILKENNY/CARLOW	40
TIPPERARY	36
WATERFORD	39
WEXFORD	42
CORK CITY	25
CORK NORTH	10
CORK WEST	15
KERRY	20
LIMERICK	33
CLARE	20
GALWAY	9
MAYO	13
ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD	5
TOTALS	1179

Road Traffic Offences Data

606. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons driving over the limit of alcohol intake in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area and throughout the country, in tabular form for 2016 and to date in 2017. [37657/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy, and I will contact her directly when this report is to hand.

Garda Deployment

607. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí located in Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37658/17]

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

to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources. I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division.

I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Division on the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 324 with 12 Garda reserves and 37 civilians. The number of Gardaí assigned to the Meath Division was 298 with 17 Reserves and 27 civilians. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves. This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 26 and 36 of whom were assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan and Meath Divisions respectively. I am also informed that a further four hundred Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

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

Garda Resources

608. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the financial allocation for An Garda Síochána in 2010 and in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37705/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The gross financial allocation for the Garda Vote in 2010 inclusive of a supplementary estimate was almost €1.53 billion. The allocation in 2015 was €1.51 billion which also included a supplementary estimate.

Immigration Policy

609. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the State will be issuing an apology to a person (details supplied); his plans to review the immigration interrogation policy at the State's airports. [37771/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): It would not be appropriate for me to go into the details of the case referred to by the Deputy. However, I am satisfied that the appropriate procedures and processes were followed in this case and that the person in question was correctly refused entry to the State. Subsequently, as an exceptional measure, she was given a limited permission to remain.

The following matters pertain in all cases where a person is refused permission to enter the State.

- There are in total twelve (12) grounds on which an immigration officer may refuse to give a permission to enter the State and these are set out at Section 4 (3) of the Immigration Act 2004 (as amended by the International protection Act 2015). While a person may be refused permission to enter the State based on a number of grounds, such refusal need only be based on any one of those grounds. Immigration officers are required to provide a written notice to the person refused entry that sets out the reasons for the decision. In all cases, removals from the State are conducted in accordance with the law. Translation facilities are available where necessary.

- An Immigration Officer before confirming a decision to refuse permission will consult with his or her Supervisor.

- Removals are essentially operational matters for the Garda National Immigration Bureau who work closely with civilian immigration officers on these matters.

- Section 5 of the Immigration Act, 2003 (as amended by the International protection Act, 2015), contains the main provisions dealing with the removal from the State of persons refused leave to land and specifies that a person to whom this section applies may be arrested by an immigration officer or a member of the Garda Síochána and detained in a prescribed place of detention for the purpose of facilitating their removal from the State, which must be as soon as is practicable.

- It is the practice to remove persons from the State on the next available flight or ship.

I accept that it would be beneficial to have dedicated facilities for the detention of persons refused entry to the State and I am therefore pleased to confirm that such facilities are being developed at Dublin Airport with a view to completion next year.

More generally Ireland operates a fair, secure and effective immigration system, and indeed, the Irish immigration system is one of the least burdensome for visitors. Immigration officers respect the dignity of all persons they engage with and carry out their functions with professionalism and care. It is equally important that persons seeking entry to the State provide accurate and full information as to the purpose of their entry. Processes and procedures are kept under regular review.

It should be noted that should any person who has been refused leave to land in the State seek entry to the State at a future point, their application will be assessed on its own merits taking all relevant information into consideration at that time. Their prior immigration history is a matter of record but does not preclude them from seeking permission to enter in the future.

As regards the person seeking entry into other Member States, this is a matter for the appropriate authorities in the Member States concerned.

Question No. 610 answered with Question No. 600.

Garda Recruitment

611. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the competition for the selection of Garda trainees the number of such recruitment campaigns that have been initiated in 2016 and and to date in 2017; the number of applications that were received in respect of each campaign; the number of applicants that were subsequently accepted to undergo Garda training in respect of each such competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37788/17]

612. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the competition for the selection of garda trainees initiated in January 2016, the number of applicants to whom an order of merit was awarded after having been placed within the top 200 ranking of applicants have subsequently been accepted to undergo the relevant garda training programme; if similar such competitions have been initiated since this date; if he will also provide the same information in respect of each campaign, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37789/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 611 and 612 together.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. I am also informed that a further 400 Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

This is an ambitious programme of accelerated recruitment and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. The most recent recruitment campaign in May 2017 again received a strong response with over 5,000 applications received. While this shows a levelling off from the exceptionally high numbers of applications received following the lifting of the moratorium in 2014 with no recruitment having taken place since 2008, it is in line with the more regular pattern pre-dating the moratorium.

The table sets out details of the campaigns in 2016 and 2017 as provided by the Commissioner.

As the Deputy will be aware the recruitment process is a matter for the Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct involvement in the matter. The Public Appointments Service (PAS) manages the initial recruitment stages for selection of Garda trainees on behalf of the Commissioner. The Order of Merit (OOM) is awarded to applicants by the PAS on successful completion of the competitive stages of the process, the final stage of which is an interview. This OOM remains with them throughout the remainder of the selection process which includes a physical, a medical and vetting.

In the case of the September 2016 competition, I am advised that 86 applicants within the top 200 OOM have commenced training in the Garda College. In relation to the May 2017 competition, the competitive stages of the process are on-going and the OOM does not therefore arise as yet.

Information in relation to the OOM for the January 2016 competition has been requested from the Commissioner and will be provided to the Deputy when it is to hand.

Competition Date	Number of Applicants	Successful Applicants forwarded by PAS to An Garda Síochána	Number who have commenced training in the Garda College
January 2016	16,650	1,341	835
September 2016	5,197	963	116
May 2017	5,399		

Extradition Arrangements

613. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Interpol red notice requests for arrests that have been received by the authorities here in the past three years, in tabular form; the number that have been carried out; the states they originate from; the alleged offences they have been issued for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37796/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): An Interpol Red Notice is a request to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending extradition. It is issued by the Interpol General Secretariat at the request of an Interpol Member Country. It is based on a valid national arrest warrant or court order to either prosecute a person or for a person to serve a prison sentence.

Interpol cannot compel any Member Country to arrest an individual who is the subject of a Red Notice.

Provisional arrest is a concept which is not recognised in Irish legislation. Accordingly, while Ireland is a Member Country of Interpol it does not recognise the Red Notice system and I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that no arrests have been made in Ireland based on Interpol Red Notices.

Citizenship Applications

614. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will grant citizenship to a family (details supplied). [37798/17]

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 a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from persons with the family name referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application is received.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship through the naturalisation process if and when they are in a position to meet all the statutory conditions for naturalisation under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Detailed information on Irish citizenship and naturalisation, as well as the relevant application forms, is available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie. The website also contains guidance on the completion of an application for naturalisation and an on-line residency calculator which may be of assistance in establishing if the statutory 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.

Direct Provision System

615. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria used in the awarding of contracts to provide direct provision facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37829/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): It is worth noting that the Direct Provision system is a whole of Government system which delivers a wide range of services to those seeking international protection in Ireland. These services include for example health services as provided by the HSE, education services as provided in primary and post-primary schools and, for adults, Education and Training Boards across the country.

Accommodation and related services (ie of management, catering, housekeeping, general maintenance and security services) are organised by the Department of Justice and Equality. The provision of these facilities and services for state owned accommodation centres was advertised by open tender in 2016. The tender sought the provision of these services at seven accommodation centres located in Tralee (two centres) & Killarney (two centres) in County Kerry, Cork City, Knockalisheen in County Clare and Athlone in County Westmeath. The tenders submitted were assessed on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) criteria, which enables the contracting authority to take account of criteria that reflect qualitative aspects of the tender submission as well as price when reaching an award decision.

The award criteria for the tender looked at the quality of the proposed services under headings of overall quality of service delivery plan, housekeeping, menu plans, security and supervision, maintenance (general and grounds keeping), additional facilities/activities, management and staffing and staff training in addition to the price. The overall marks were weighted with the price being 40% of the overall marks and the quality of the proposed services being 60% of the overall marks. Following this assessment, contracts for each of the state run centres were awarded in November 2016.

In relation to the twenty five commercially run centres, to date these contracts have been

awarded following responses to calls for expressions of interest. From 2018, all contracts will be awarded through an open tendering competition to comply with EU Directive 24/2014 and will be conducted in accordance with the open procedure under the European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016 (Statutory Instrument 284 of 2016). These tenders will also be assessed on the MEAT criteria. Service providers will be required to as part of the assessment process, include in their staffing proposal details of qualifications or experience in social care in order to assess their expertise in dealing with vulnerable and at risk persons. As with the state owned accommodation centres, tenders will be assessed on the quality of their service proposal as well as price. In addition, tenders will be designed to include recommendations from the Report of the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process including Direct Provision and other supports for Asylum Seekers. There will be a particular focus on the provision of facilities within accommodation centres to allow families to cook for themselves as well as improvements to quality of living space for families in centres.

It is, of course, open to any contractor or NGO (or groups of NGOs) to seek to engage in this procurement process to provide accommodation and related services to people seeking international protection. I would welcome the participation of groups or organisations who have expressed concerns about standards in Direct Provision in the upcoming procurement processes. In other EU Member States, reception centres are quite often managed by NGOs in partnership with the State. We have not, to date, received any expressions of interest by an NGO or NGO group to manage an accommodation centre in Ireland when expressions of interest have been sought.

It is the aim of this Department that the tendering for such facilities by way of open competition will ensure that quality accommodation centres can be procured while ensuring value for money for the Exchequer.

Direct Provision Data

616. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria used by his Department in relation to companies awarded contracts to provide direct provision facilities when assessing their level of experience and expertise in working with vulnerable and at risk persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37830/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Direct Provision system is a whole of Government system which delivers a wide range of State services to those seeking international protection in Ireland. These services include health services as provided by the HSE, education services as provided by primary and post-primary schools and, for adults, Education and Training Boards across the country. The Reception and Integration Agency, whose role is to oversee the provision of accommodation and ancillary services to asylum seekers, has a Health Unit, an Education Unit and a Child and Family Services Unit which can link vulnerable and at risk persons with the appropriate services. It is the role of these units to act as conduits between residents, staff at accommodation centres, state agencies (including TUSLA and the HSE) and local schools.

The provision of management, catering, housekeeping, general maintenance and security services for state owned asylum seeker accommodation centres was advertised by open tender in 2016. The tender sought the provision of these services at seven accommodation centres located in Tralee (two centres) & Killarney (two centres) in County Kerry, Cork City, Knockalisheen in County Clare and Athlone in County Westmeath. The tenders submitted were assessed on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) criteria, which enables the contracting authority to take account of criteria that reflect qualitative aspects of the tender

submission as well as price when reaching an award decision.

The award criteria for the tender looked at the quality of the proposed services under headings of overall quality of service delivery plan, housekeeping, menu plans, security and supervision, maintenance (general and grounds keeping), additional facilities/activities, management and staffing and staff training in addition to the price. The overall marks were weighted with the price being 40% of the overall marks and the quality of the proposed services being 60% of the overall marks. Following this assessment, contracts for each of the state run centres were awarded in November 2016.

In relation to the commercially run centres, to date these contracts have been awarded following responses to calls for expressions of interest. From 2018, all contracts will be awarded through an open tendering competition to comply with EU Directive 24/2014 and will be conducted in accordance with the open procedure under the European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016 (Statutory Instrument 284 of 2016). These tenders will also be assessed on the MEAT criteria. Service providers will be required to as part of the assessment process, include in their staffing proposal details of qualifications or experience in social care in order to assess their expertise in dealing with vulnerable and at risk persons.

In addition, tenders will be designed to include recommendations from the Report of the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process including Direct Provision and other supports for Asylum Seekers. There will be a particular focus on the provision of facilities within accommodation centres to allow families to cook for themselves as well as improvements to quality of living space for families in centres.

It is the aim of this Department that the tendering for such facilities by way of open competition will ensure that quality accommodation centres can be procured while ensuring value for money for the Exchequer.

Garda Station Refurbishment

617. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of works on a Garda station (details supplied); and the expected completion date. [37835/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Office of Public Works (OPW) has primary responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation and works closely with the Garda authorities in this regard. As Minister, I have no role in these matters.

The Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 includes the development of a new Garda station at Bailieborough, Co Cavan. I understand that following consultation between Garda management and the OPW, a site was identified for the new Garda station in Bailieborough. The OPW is progressing the acquisition of the site. Timelines and details on procurement and construction of the new station will become clearer at that time.

Garda Vetting Applications

618. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of Garda vetting for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37837/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The vetting application in the case to which the Deputy refers relates to a person who is in an ongoing process for

recruitment to An Garda Síochána. As the Deputy will appreciate, in such cases the Garda Authorities can liaise directly with the applicants in respect of the progress of the recruitment process. The Deputy will be aware also that in respect of recruitment to An Garda Síochána checks secondary to vetting are also required and these can take time to be completed.

Third Level Graduate Scheme

619. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a reply will issue directly to persons (details supplied) in relation to the EEA students graduate programme; if he will clarify the concerns raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37856/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Third Level Graduate Scheme was first introduced in April 2007 and has been revised by the immigration authorities from time to time, most recently in May 2017. The Scheme is intended to assist legally resident Irish educated non-EEA graduates, holding an award from a recognised Irish awarding body, to remain in Ireland after they have completed their studies. The Scheme provides an opportunity for such graduates to transition to an immigration permission based on an employment or critical skills employment permit or research hosting agreement.

Extensive guidance (<http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Student%20Pathway>) on the qualifying criteria are detailed on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. Some of the key feature of the Scheme include the following::

- It will be open to those who have been notified on or after 1 January 2017 by the awarding institution that they have achieved the relevant award and will be expected to present suitable evidence to this effect.

- They must not have exceeded the seven year limit on holding a student immigration permission (subject to the exception for persons presenting an award at level 9 or above of the National Framework of Qualifications).

- They must be of good character and fully compliant with Irish law during their previous residence in the State.

It is also important to stress that persons who have already benefitted from the Third Level Graduate Scheme will only be permitted to access the revised Scheme in very limited circumstances by presenting a new qualification that they had not previously relied on for this purpose. The Immigration Service, in common with any Government service, will from time to time introduce or change schemes in line with the Government's strategic priorities. In such circumstances it is not unreasonable that beneficiaries expectations should be limited to the conditions of the scheme at the point at which they originally qualified.

Finally, a direct reply will issue from my Department to the person concerned dealing with their particular case and all the issues raised.

Garda Stations

620. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for the reopening of Ballinspittle Garda station in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37859/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreci-

ate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter. This includes responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities, so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

Indeed, this was the basis on which the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was developed and implemented, resulting in the closure of some 139 Garda stations, including Ballinspittle. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the closures have allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion particularly with regard to various targeted police operations.

The Deputy will be aware that, under the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Government is committed to launching a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

At its meeting on 13 June 2017, the Government noted the Garda Commissioner's interim Report which analysed population and crime trends and, taking account of the availability of stations for reuse, makes a number of recommendations including that Stepaside Station in Co. Dublin be reopened on a pilot basis. The Report also indicates that the Commissioner is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend the reopening of Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Donard, Co. Wicklow in her final report. If a second station is to be reopened in Dublin, the Commissioner has indicated that, subject to further analysis, the former station at Rush, Co. Dublin will be recommended for reopening.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that relevant information, including crime related statistics and population analysis, continues to be examined in respect of a number of areas, including the geographical area previously served by the former Garda station at Ballinspittle, with a view to determining the appropriateness from an operational perspective of their inclusion in the pilot project.

The final report in relation to this matter is expected to be received shortly and it will be brought to Government thereafter.

Garda Station Opening Hours

621. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there has been a decrease in Garda hours in the main station in Ballybofey and the Stranorlar area in Donegal in the past year; if so, if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of local businesses and residents of a noticeable increase in criminal activities in the area; the way in which he will address these concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37881/17]

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

In this context, I understand that Garda management keeps under review the overall policing arrangements, including the operation of Garda stations and assignment of personnel, throughout the State having regard to, for example, crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level.

This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources and that the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Ballybofey Garda station is open to members of the public on Monday-Saturday from 10am to 6pm and from 12 midday to 3pm on Sundays and bank-holidays, with mobile patrols conducted over the 24-hour period. Station opening times may vary and are dependent on the availability of Garda personnel to be deployed on duty maintaining the Public Office in the Garda station. When the Garda station is not open to members of the public a sign is prominently displayed in the Garda station window outlining, contact details for the District Headquarters in Letterkenny, in the event of a policing service being required, and when the Garda station will next be open.

I understand from Garda authorities that there is a good working relationship between An Garda Síochána and stakeholders locally and issues arising are addressed through local policing fora and personal engagement with local members. In addition to local patrols, crime prevention and detection initiatives are ongoing, including intelligence led initiatives, such as Operation 'Thor', to disrupt criminal activity in the area. In addition to operational policing initiatives, crime prevention meetings have been held locally recently by the Divisional Crime Prevention Officer, providing crime prevention and personal protection advices, especially regarding property-marking and security advice. Local meetings are very well attended.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner that, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 400 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow for the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including Donegal, in the coming years.

Garda Resources

622. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the investment his Department has made in Garda infrastructure, personnel, Garda equipment, cars and so on, since March 2016 in the Cavan, Monaghan and Meath areas, by station, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37886/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the allocation of Garda resources in the State

and I, as Minister, have no role in relation to the matter.

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

Prison Service Data

623. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons employed in the Irish Prison Service other than prison officers who are in receipt of rent allowance; the categories of each of these persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37943/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the rent allowance is payable to all operational prison grades in accordance with their terms and conditions of employment.

Rent allowance is not payable to other civilian grades working in Prisons i.e. Chaplains, Psychologists, doctors, prison nurses, and clerical grades.

The numbers and grades of Irish Prison Service employees, other than the prison officer grade, who are in receipt of rent allowance, is as set out in the table.

Grade	Number in receipt of Rent Allowance
GOVERNOR GRADE 1	1
GOVERNOR GRADE 2	8
GOVERNOR 3	12
DEPUTY GOVERNOR	3
ASSISTANT GOVERNOR	28
WORK TRAINING OFFICER	289
HEALTHCARE NURSE MANAGER	2
CHIEF NURSE OFFICER 2	11
NURSE OFFICER	91
INSPECTOR OF WORKS	3
CHIEF OFFICER 1	9
CHIEF OFFICER 2	59
CHIEF TRADES OFFICER 1	2
CHIEF TRADES OFFICER 2	6
ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER	283
INDUSTRIAL MANAGER	4
IND TRAINING INSTRUCTOR 2	5
TRADES OFFICER	42
CLERK 2	2
INDUSTRIAL SUPERVISOR	12

Prison Service Staff

624. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 145 of 5 July 2017, the way in which prison clerical officers are employed in line with the general Civil Service clerical officer grade and associated terms and conditions

of employment in view of the fact that the general Civil Service grade receive overtime, flexi time and term time, none of which are available to prison clerical officers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37944/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Prison Service that contracts offered to Prison Clerical Officers are in line with legislation and regulations governing civil service recruitment. The granting of particular working arrangements, raised by the Deputy, is at the discretion of civil service bodies and is determined by organisational requirements.

Garda Station Closures

625. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Kilmallock Ggarda station in County Limerick has been closed indefinitely; if so, the reason therefor; when it will reopen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37950/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that Kilmallock Garda station was closed on a temporary basis on 20 July 2017 to facilitate an upgrade to the station, including the construction of new internal partitions and fire doors, the installation of new wheelchair accessible reception counter and work stations in the public office, new locker room fit out, and associated mechanical and electrical works.

I understand that the works will be completed this month following which the re-installation of furniture and minor snagging will be carried out. It is not anticipated that these matters will delay the re-occupation of the Garda station and the OPW will work with local management regarding same.

In the meantime, and to facilitate the upgrade in progress, personnel attached to the station have been temporarily relocated to Bruff Garda station (open on a 24 hour basis), a distance of approximately 10 kms from Kilmallock, and continue to patrol the Kilmallock sub-District.

Registration of Wills

626. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for the development of a central register of wills. [37957/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that the views of the Law Society on the desirability of establishing a registration of wills system were sought in 2005. The Society's Probate, Administration and Trusts Committee subsequently informed the Department that it did not favour the establishment of a Register of Wills for a number of reasons. Firstly, since the registration would be voluntary, there might be very limited usage of such a service. Secondly, even where a will was registered, such registration would not guarantee the validity of the will if the statutory requirements in relation to signature, witnesses etc. had not been complied with. Moreover, there could be no guarantee that a regis-

tered will was in fact the final will of the testator concerned. I should add that the Law Society reiterated these concerns in a letter to my Department earlier this year.

In light of the foregoing, it is unlikely that any initiative to establish a system for registering wills in this jurisdiction would command the required level of support and involvement from the legal profession.

Garda Station Closures

627. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Garda stations closed in counties Carlow and Kilkenny in 2012 and 2013 (details supplied) are among the six stations being examined for reopening under the pilot programme; the position regarding the Commissioner's report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37959/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter. This includes responsibility for the formulation of proposals in relation to the opening and closing of Garda stations, taking into account crime trends and policing priorities, so as to ensure that the best possible use is made of these resources.

Indeed, this was the basis on which the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was developed and implemented, resulting in the closure of some 139 Garda stations. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the closures have allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion particularly with regard to various targeted police operations.

Under the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Government is committed to launching a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order. At its meeting on 13 June 2017, the Government noted the Garda Commissioner's interim Report which analysed population and crime trends and, taking account of the availability of stations for reuse, makes a number of recommendations including that Stepside Station in Co. Dublin be reopened on a pilot basis. The Report also indicates that the Commissioner is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend the reopening of Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Donard, Co. Wicklow in her final report. If a second station is to be reopened in Dublin, the Commissioner has indicated that, subject to further analysis, the former station at Rush, Co. Dublin will be recommended for reopening.

The final report of the Commissioner is expected to be received shortly and it will be brought to Government thereafter.

Prison Service

628. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the review being undertaken by officials of the Prison Service and his Department in consultation with the Attorney General examining the necessary legislative and-or administrative changes arising from the ruling in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37960/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 12 July, 2016, the Su-

preme Court dismissed the State's appeal in the case known as 'O'Farrell, McDonald, Rafferty -v- The Governor of Portlaoise Prison'. The case concerns an appeal taken by the State against a judgement of the High Court ordering the release of the three named prisoners who had been transferred to Ireland from the UK where they had been sentenced, under the provisions of the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners Acts, 1995 -1997.

The judgement is detailed and has implications for the continuance in its present form of the process operated by the Irish Prison Service for transferring prisoners from other States to Ireland. The practical effect of this judgement and whether it will necessitate legislative and/or administrative changes is being examined by officials of the Irish Prison Service and my Department in consultation with Attorney General. Given the complex nature of the review being undertaken, it is not possible at this stage to indicate a time frame for its conclusion.

Brexit Staff

629. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37996/17]

630. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38012/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 629 and 630 together.

The International Policy Division within my Department has been assigned responsibility for coordinating the Department's work as it relates to matters concerning UK withdrawal from the EU. The Division is headed-up by an Assistant Secretary and comprises a team in Dublin and a team based in the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels, currently consisting of thirteen officers in total.

This figure includes an additional post to the Permanent Representation to support the Brussels based aspects of the forthcoming negotiations which was filled in July 2017, and an additional post in the Dublin team filled last month.

Complementing this, six senior officers from each of the key areas in the Department (who are in turn supported by relevant staff) have been selected to make up a cross Divisional working group to focus on the key negotiating issues.

The possibility that additional staffing resources may be required to work on Brexit related issues has been flagged in the Department's Workforce Plan. This is being kept under review and weekly progress updates are provided to the Department's management Board on the analysis and preparations underway. Costs incurred are being met from the Department's overall budget, and those related specifically to Brexit cannot be readily extracted from overall ongoing work in the Department.

Construction Costs

631. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017

in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to tackle this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38028/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department has not engaged in any construction projects over the past 18 months in which construction inflation has been a factor. However, it is anticipated this issue will become more problematic as the construction industry continues to recover. As the Deputy will be aware, the Office of Public Works acts on behalf of my Department and many of the agencies under its aegis and may be best placed to provide the Deputy with any relevant information in this regard.

Commercial Rates

632. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the commercial rates levied on private nursing homes throughout the country; if there is a connection between the number of residents in a nursing home which would be relevant to the commercial activity and the level of commercial rates levied; if rules or guidelines are applied in order that the rates charged on nursing homes can be examined nationally to see if there is a consistent approach on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38111/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the valuation legislation (Valuation Acts 2001-2015), the Commissioner of Valuation, who is a statutory officer and Head of the Valuation Office, has sole responsibility for the maintenance of valuation lists of all commercial properties in the State which are used by all local authorities in the calculation of rates and I, as Minister, have no function in this regard.

The basic premise under valuation legislation is that all buildings and lands used or developed for any purpose, including private nursing homes, are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act 2001 as amended. Those exempt properties would ordinarily include those that meet the criteria set out in Paragraph 14, Schedule 4 of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. Paragraph 14(a) provides for exemption from rates for nursing homes occupied by a body which is not established, and the affairs of which are not conducted, for the purpose of making a private profit. Paragraph 14(b) provides for exemption from rates for nursing homes occupied by a body whose expenses in carrying on the activity are defrayed wholly or mainly out of monies provided by the Exchequer, other than where such defrayal occurs by reason of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009.

A valuation of a private nursing home for commercial rates purposes is arrived at by estimating the *Net Annual Value* (NAV) of the property, at a specified valuation date. The term “net annual value” has a legal definition and is set out in section 48 of the Valuation Act 2001 as the rent for which, one year with another, the property might, in its actual state, be reasonably expected to let from year to year, on the assumption that the probable average annual cost of repairs, insurance and other expenses (if any) that would be necessary to maintain the property in that state, and all rates and other taxes payable in respect of the property, are borne by the tenant. This definition of Net Annual Value is applied to all rateable properties and on a nationwide basis.

Estimating the NAV of a rateable property is an evidence-based exercise. In this regard, I am informed that the Valuation Office analyses relevant market rental transactions for all rateable properties including nursing homes in accordance with the legislation, best practice internationally as set out in Practice Guidance Notes from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), well-established valuation principles and case law arising from the independent

Valuation Tribunal and the higher Courts and the conclusion drawn from that analysis is applied to similarly circumstanced property using the “comparative” method of valuation which, as the name implies, employs direct comparison with other similar properties. Specifically with regard to the valuation of nursing homes, the number of bed places in the facility, which when taken with other individual circumstances, would be a determining factor in arriving at the net annual value and this is a consistent approach used on a nationwide basis.

The position regarding the determination of rates under Irish law is that there is a distinct separation of function between the valuation of rateable property and the setting and collection of commercial rates. The amount of rates payable by a particular ratepayer in any calendar year is a product of the valuation set by the Valuation Office, multiplied by the Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) decided annually by the elected members of each local authority. Whereas the setting of valuations is the responsibility of the Valuation Office (subject to the appeal provisions in the legislation), the annual setting of the ARV is a reserved function of the elected members of each Local Authority and the Commissioner of Valuation has no function in that regard. Accordingly, details on the amount of rates levied on nursing homes are not available to the Valuation Office or to my Department. Regarding the examination of rates nationally to ensure a consistent approach, the position is that while the basis of valuation is consistent across the country, the ARV can fluctuate to some degree, depending on the local authority area in which the nursing home is located. This is a function of local government and reflects the local circumstances surrounding the adoption of the ARV in each local authority and relates to the budgetary position which the elected members of the Council must address annually in their determination of the ARV for which they have exclusive responsibility.

Law Reform Commission Reports

633. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to implement the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission report number LR67 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38130/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): In its Third Programme for Law Reform 2008-2014, the Law Reform Commission outlined its intention to progress statutory codification in a number of areas of land law, including adverse possession of land. The implementation of reforms outlined in the Report referred to by the Deputy (LRC 67 - 2002), as well as earlier recommendations in its 1989 “Report on Land Law and Conveyancing Law (1) General Proposals”, would be relevant in this context. It appears however that due to more pressing law reform priorities, it has not been possible for the Commission to bring this work to a conclusion.

The acquisition of title to land by means of adverse possession is an important aspect of land law, involving a complex interplay between limitation periods and registration rights in respect of both freehold and leasehold land. While I have no immediate plans to bring forward proposals for legislative reform in this area, operation of the existing statutory framework is kept under review by my Department.

Public Services Card

634. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments

which will now be dependant on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38152/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can confirm that as and from 19th September 2016, all persons applying for a certificate of naturalisation who are aged 18 and above and who are resident in the State must be registered with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for a Public Services Card. This is an important measure for identification purposes and to protect against fraud and identity theft and to uphold the integrity of the Irish naturalisation process. It ensures that the identity of applicants for naturalisation will be verified to a high standard.

The Private Security Authority intends to examine the suitability of the Public Services Card in connection with its licence application process subject to discussions with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Work is also ongoing with a view to transitioning the Garda Age Card function to the Public Services Card.

White Collar Crime

635. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the legislation that will be introduced to tackle white collar crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38165/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): While my Department has responsibility for legislation addressing some aspects of white collar crime including fraud and corruption, other aspects, such as insider trading and Companies Acts offences, fall within the responsibility of other Government Departments. In fact, the Deputy may wish to note that officials from my Department are working closely with officials from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Finance in reviewing the approach to tackling white collar crime and a substantial amount of work, including the enacting of legislation, has already been done in this respect over the last number of years.

The breadth and diversity of the issues connected with this form of crime are such that no one Department or no one piece of legislation could effectively address all of them and, therefore, legislation in this area is continuously under review and development. In this regard, there are a number of legislative developments of particular relevance.

A package of measures which will include specific legislative proposals is currently being worked upon. I would anticipate that an announcement on this package will be made in due course.

Road Safety

636. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress he has made with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Garda Commissioner and the chairman of the Revenue Commissioners in establishing a multi-agency approach in order to ascertain if there are additional legislative or other solutions which can assist in dealing with the use of scrambler and quad bikes more comprehensively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38173/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware

that, under the Road Traffic Acts, any member of An Garda Síochána is empowered to stop a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place and demand production of a driver licence or learner permit. In addition, Gardaí may inspect the vehicle for compliance with vehicle standards legislation, which makes it an offence to drive without reasonable consideration, drive carelessly, or drive dangerously. The Garda authorities also have powers of seizure, detention, storage and disposal of vehicles under road traffic legislation. I am further informed that the use of quad bikes and scramblers in public parks and open spaces is strictly prohibited by the local authorities under the Parks and Open Spaces Bye-Laws 2011.

Despite the road traffic and other relevant legislation available in this area, the Garda authorities have indicated that there are issues of safety involved in enforcement of these laws which are best addressed through a multi-agency approach. I am informed that Gardaí are working with local authorities, including park authorities, to examine other solutions, such as engineering solutions. Enhanced fencing and bike gates are examples of engineering measures taken to restrict access to parks.

I share the concern in relation to the very serious public safety and anti-social issues associated with the misuse of such vehicles and to better facilitate this multi-agency approach, I have written to the relevant parties, including the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, as well as the Garda Commissioner and the Chairman of the Revenue Commissioners, in order to ascertain whether there are additional legislative or other solutions which can assist us in dealing with this issue more comprehensively. A number of responses have been received and are being examined at present. As a next step, when all responses have been received, I intend to convene a meeting of all of the interested parties and in order to identify more effective possible solutions and assign responsibility and timeframes for them.

Garda Deployment

637. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 399 of 12 July 2017, the progress made to date to increase the Garda traffic corps by 10% during 2017 as set out by An Garda Síochána as a priority in the Garda policing plan for 2017; the number assigned to the Garda traffic corps in January 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38183/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have requested a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the matter in question and I will write directly to the Deputy when the report is to hand.

Probate Applications

638. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for significant delays in the probate system; the steps he will take to address these delays to ensure that probate can be processed in no more than a few months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38199/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Probate Office is

an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in 14 provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the current waiting time for a Grant of Representation in the Dublin Probate Office has been reduced to 15 weeks for applications lodged by a solicitor (90% of applications are made via this route) and 28 weeks for personal applications. This has been achieved by a review of business processes within the office and an extra Executive Officer and Higher Executive Officer being assigned to the office. All applications are assessed on the basis of the date on which they are lodged, an approach which provides fairness and equity to all applicants. Priority is given to probate applications where there is a particular urgency or in extenuating circumstances. In such cases, it is open to applicants to bring the matter to the attention of the Probate Office.

Probate applications are also processed at 14 District Probate Registries and waiting times vary across the Registries due to the volume of applications received and the skill sets and operational priorities within the offices. Again, priority is given to probate applications where there is a particular urgency or in extenuating circumstances. In such cases, it is open to applicants to bring the matter to the attention of the District Probate Registry.

The Courts Service has advised that backlogs in the probate system are a cause for concern and that a review of the probate system is being carried out at present. It is anticipated that a report with recommendations for the modernisation of the process will be completed by the end of 2017 for presentation to the Senior Management Team of the Courts Service and to the Courts Service Board which should further assist in improving waiting times.

Prison Service Staff

639. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if retired prison officers are being employed on a contract basis in the prison system; if so, if there are age restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38227/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that the Irish Prison Service has recently run a competition to recruit Retired Prison Officers on short term contracts for a maximum period of six months to perform duties at Prison Officer level. Those recruited will not exceed age 60, by the end of their contract, which is the compulsory age of retirement of a Prison Officer.

This is a short term measure to facilitate operational service pressures caused by a rise in retirements until such a time as sufficient recruitment of full time permanent Prison Officers has been completed. It is intended to recruit approximately 87 new Recruit Prison Officers this year and a further 216 Recruit Prison Officers in 2018.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Staff

640. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí on secondment to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; the rank of each; the duration of the secondment; the person to whom they are answerable during their secondment; the measures in place to avoid a conflict of interest in cases of investigation into Garda busi-

nesses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38249/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to her on receipt of same.

Penalty Points System Investigation

641. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the nature of disciplinary action against gardaí who have been found to have abused the penalty points system following internal or GSOC inquiries since 2013; the number of gardaí involved; and if any of these gardaí were subsequently promoted. [38250/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that disciplinary matters within An Garda Síochána are governed by the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (Discipline) Regulations 2007 and are a matter for the Garda Commissioner.

I have been advised by the Garda Commissioner that the results of disciplinary actions taken where Garda members have been found to be in breach of discipline relating to the Garda Fixed Charge Processing System (FCPS) are as provided in the following table. Included disciplinary files relate to failure to issue FCPS, duplication of FCPS, avoidance of FCPS and irregularities in relation to FCPS. The Deputy should note that one of the files in the table was created in 2012 but the member involved was not found in breach until after 2013 and, for this reason, it is included.

I am further advised by the Garda Commissioner that all of the investigations listed were as a result of internal discipline investigations and that none arose from GSOC inquiries.

In addition to the overarching oversight role of the Policing Authority in relation to policing services, the Deputy may wish to be aware that Judge Matthew Deery (retired President of the Circuit Court) was appointed as the sole Independent Oversight Authority for the FCPS Cancellation Policy by the then Minister in January 2015. The appointment followed a recommendation contained in the Garda Professional Standards Unit (GPSU) report, "Examination of the Procedures, Policy and Decision-Making Processes in relation to Cancellations on the Fixed Charge Processing System of Road Traffic-related Offences".

The terms of reference for Judge Deery's role are as follows:

- Review and monitor the cancellation of FCPS notices by An Garda Síochána with a view to ensuring compliance with Garda policy on the cancellation of FCPS notices;
- Communicate any matters he considers appropriate to the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána;
- Communicate any matters he considers appropriate to the Minister for Justice and Equality and report to the Minister annually on his findings and on the discharge of his functions;
- Examine and report on any specific matters relevant to the operation of the FCPS at the request of the Minister, should this be required.

The role of the Independent Oversight Authority is in addition to regular audit checks on the full operation of the FCPS by the Garda Internal Audit Section. Furthermore, GPSU continues to play an oversight role in the context of standards and the FCPS.

Judge Deery submitted his first annual report in January 2016 (covering the year 2015) and submitted his second annual report (covering the year 2016) in February 2017, in which he stated that he is satisfied that there has been substantial compliance with FCPS policy and procedures.

Year	No. of Garda members who have been found in breach of discipline involving FCPS	Type of breaches against the member	Result of disciplinary action
2017	1	Neglect of Duty x 2	TRIP Advice
2016	0	n/a	n/a
2015	2	a) Neglect of Duty b) Discreditable Conduct x 3	Advice TRIP
2014	2	a) Disobedience of Orders b) Discreditable Conduct	TRIP Caution
2013	3	a) Neglect of Duty x 2 b) Neglect of Duty c) Neglect of Duty	Reprimand x 2 TRIP TRIP
2012	1	Neglect of Duty Discreditable Conduct x 2	TRIP

TRIP = Temporary Reduction in Pay

Garda Deployment

642. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to each station in Togher Garda district in January 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and to date in September 2017, in tabular form. [38288/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. Furthermore when allocations are taking place comprehensive consultation is carried out with local management during which all factors are taken into consideration. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

Togher District forms part of the Cork City Division and I am informed that the strength of that Division on the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 657 Gardaí of whom 115 were allocated to the Togher District. The Division also has 45 Garda Reserves and 62 civilians. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána, 25 of whom have been assigned to the Cork City Division. I am also informed that a further 400 Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda District, including the Togher District in the coming years.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the strength of the Togher District in January 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and on 31 July 2017 is as set out in the following table.

TOGHER DISTRICT STRENGTH 2010-2017

STATION	2010	2012	2014	2016	2017*
BISHOP-STOWN	25	24	21	21	20
CARRIGALINE	20	20	20	19	20
CROSS-HAVEN	3	3	3	2	2
DOUGLAS	23	27	24	21	19
PASSAGE WEST	4	3	3	2	2
TOGHER	60	54	52	50	52
TOTAL	135	131	123	115	115

*UP TO 31 JULY 2017

Question No. 643 answered with Question No. 548.

Direct Provision Data

644. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the location and

number of direct provision centres in operation; and the number of persons residing in each centre. [38326/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): There are currently 32 centres under contract to the Reception and Integration Agency. The specific statistics sought by the Deputy in relation to centre location and occupancy are provided in the following table and were collated at the end of August 2017.

County	Centre	Address	Occupancy
Clare	Knockalisheen	Meelick	227
Cork	Ashbourne Hse	Glounthaune	91
	Kinsale Road	Cork City	247
	Glenvera	Wellington Road	103
	Millstreet	Millstreet	172
	Clonakilty Lodge	Clonakilty, Co. Cork	94
Dublin	The Towers	The Ninth Lock, Clondalkin, D.22	218
	Georgian Court	77-79 Lower Gardiner St. Dublin 1	85
	Hatch Hall	28 Lower Hatch Street, Dublin 2	136
Galway	Eglinton	The Proms, Salthill	172
	Great Western House	Eyre Square	148
Kerry	Atlas House (Killarney)	Killarney	74
	Atlas House (Tralee)	Tralee	99
	Johnston Marina	Tralee	78
	Park Lodge	Killarney	40
Kildare	Eyrepowell	Newbridge	85
Laois	Montague	Emo, Portlaoise	195
Limerick	Hanratty's	Glentworth Street, Limerick	116
	Mount Trenchard	Foynes, Co. Limerick	85
Longford	Richmond Court	Richmond Street, Longford	76
Mayo	The Old Convent	Ballyhaunis	214
Meath	Mosney	Mosney	673
Monaghan	1 St. Patricks	Monaghan	145
Sligo	Globe House	Chapel Hill	194
Waterford	Atlantic House	Tramore, Co. Waterford	80
	Ocean View	Tramore, Co. Waterford	94
	Birchwood	Ballytruckle Road	130
	Viking House	Coffee House Lane	71
Westmeath	Athlone	Athlone	254
		Total	4396

County	Centre	Address	Occupancy
Dublin	Watergate House	11-14 Usher's Quay, Dublin 8	57
Louth	Carroll Village	Dundalk	55
		Total - Self Catering	112
Dublin	Balseskin	1 St. Margarets, Finglas, Dublin 11	219
		Total - Reception Centre	219
		Grand total	4727

Direct Provision Data

645. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the numbers of single adults, families and children residing in each direct provision centre. [38327/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The information requested by the Deputy is compiled on an annual basis and published in the RIA Annual Report which is available on the RIA website www.ria.gov.ie.

RIA also compile statistics on the gender, age, family composition etc. of residents on a monthly basis, however this is not available on a centre by centre basis. What can be said is that at the end of July 2017 there were 2,356 single persons, 711 married persons, 377 lone parents and 1,233 children residing in State provided accommodation. There was also a small number of persons (90) whose status had yet to be recorded. This information is published in the Monthly Reports on the RIA website.

Direct Provision Data

646. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons admitted to each direct provision centre in each of the years 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the length of time these persons have remained within the direct provision system. [38328/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The information requested is not compiled by the Reception and Integration Agency in the detail required by the Deputy. What can be said is that the RIA Monthly and Annual Reports published on the RIA website www.ria.gov.ie contain a wide range of statistics including the number of persons in each centre and statistics related to duration of stay. The following table details the numbers of new applicants for asylum accommodated by RIA.

Year	New Asylum Applicants Accommodated by RIA
2009	2062
2010	1391
2011	909

2012	715
2013	727
2014	1141
2015	2828
2016	1749
2017 (up to 31st August 2017)	1375

The following table details the duration of stay by applicants in state provided accommodation at the 31st August 2017. These figures are based on latest entry into state provided accommodation.

Less than 3 years	More than 3 years and less than 5 years	More than 5 years and less than 7 years	More than 7 years
3844	541	214	208

By comparison, the statistics for the duration of stay for applicants in state provided accommodation at the end of 2016 were as follows:

Less than 3 years	More than 3 years and less than 5 years	More than 5 years and less than 7 years	More than 7 years
3410	468	239	348

It should be noted that when the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers examined the figures in 2015, there were 1,480 people in direct provision for 5 years or more. This figure is now 422 people. The vast majority of those cases that are still awaiting a final decision on their protection cannot be processed for various reasons such as pending judicial reviews. In effect, this means that all relevant people have received a first instance decision and for cases not fully resolved, there can be complex reasons why these cases have not been resolved.

Direct Provision Expenditure

647. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost of the direct provision services per year in each of the years 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [38329/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 32 accommodation centres being operated under the direct provision system. The information requested by the Deputy in relation to details of the cost of direct provision services per year from 2009 to date is set out as follows.

Year	Total Expenditure
2009	€86.5m
2010	€79.07m
2011	€69.5m
2012	€62.3m
2013	€55.2m
2014	€53.2m
2015	€56.492m
2016	€60.926m

2017 (up to 31/08/2017)

€38.013m

Direct Provision Data

648. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of private operators running direct provision centres; the number of centres each private operator runs; and the amount paid to each of these providers in each of the years 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [38334/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All accommodation centres for those persons seeking protection, whether State-owned or privately owned, are operated by commercial companies. There are currently 32 accommodation centres being operated under the direct provision system. The information requested by the Deputy in relation to details of current centre location and contractor is set out in the table.

Contractors for Accommodation Centres

County	Centre	Address	Contractor	State or Privately Owner
Clare	Knockalisheen	Meelick	Campbell Catering t/a Aramark Ireland	State
Cork	Ashbourne House	Glounthaune	Barlow Properties	Private
	Kinsale Road	Cork City	Campbell Catering t/a Aramark Ireland	State
	Glenvera	Wellington Road	Bideau Ltd	Private
	Millstreet	Millstreet	Millstreet Equestrian Services	Private
	Clonakilty Lodge	Clonakilty	D and A Limited	Private
Dublin	The Towers	Ninth Lock Road, Clondalkin	Fazyard Limited	Private
	Georgian Court	77-79 Lower Gardiner Street	Old George Ltd	Private
	Hatch Hall	28 Lower Hatch Street	East Coast Catering (Ireland)	Private
	Baleskin	St. Margarets, Finglas, Dublin 11	East Coast Catering (Ireland)	Private
	Watergate House	11-14 Usher's Quay, Dublin 8	Maison Builders Ltd	Private
Galway	Eglinton	The Proms, Salthill	Maplestar Ltd	Private

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County	Centre	Address	Contractor	State or Private-ly Owner
	Great Western House	Eyre Square	Shaun Hennelly	Private
Kerry	Atlas House (Killarney)	Killarney	OFM Limited	State
	Atlas House (Tralee)	Tralee	OFM Limited	State
	Johnston Marina	Tralee	OFM Limited	State
	Park Lodge	Killarney	OFM Limited	State
Kildare	Eyrepowell	Newbridge	Peachport Ltd	Private
Laois	Montague	Emo	Fazyard Ltd	Private
Limerick	Hanratty's	Glentworth Street, Limerick	Birch Rentals Ltd	Private
	Mount Trenchard	Foynes	Baycaster Ltd	Private
Longford	Richmond Court	Richmond Street, Longford	Mint Horizon Ltd	Private
Louth	Carroll Village	Dundalk	East Coast Catering (Ireland)	Private
Mayo	The Old Convent	Ballyhaunis	Bridgestock	Private
Meath	Mosney	Mosney	Mosney PLC	Private
Monaghan	St. Patricks	Monaghan	Tattonward Ltd	Private
Sligo	Globe House	Chapel Hill	Bridgestock	Private
Waterford	Atlantic House	Tramore	Atlantic Blue Ltd	Private
	Ocean View	Tramore	Ocean View Accommodation Ltd	Private
	Birchwood	Ballytruckle Road	Stompool Ltd	Private
	Viking House	Coffee House Lane	Millstreet Equestrian Services	Private
Westmeath	Athlone	Athlone	Campbell Catering t/a Aramark Ireland	State

Since the start of 2016, 3 accommodation centres have been closed - The Staircase in Dublin, Bridgewater House in County Tipperary and Westbourne Lodge in County Limerick.

Extensive and detailed information on the amount paid by my Department to each company contracted to provide direct provision accommodation every year up to and including 2014 can be found on the RIA website www.ria.gov.ie under the 'Contract Values' section of the website. This is in accordance with the Reception & Integration Agency's policy on disclosure of financial information which was agreed with the Office of the Information Commissioner. The Deputy will appreciate that it is not appropriate to provide values for current contracts entered into by my Department. Negotiations take place with a number of commercial entities on an ongoing basis with a clear focus on achieving the best value for money in respect of each

contract. It is not in the interests of yielding best value for the taxpayer that details of current individual contracts are made available to other commercial bodies who are, or may be in the future, engaged in these negotiations.

Direct Provision Data

649. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons living in direct provision centres who have been granted permission to remain here. [38331/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): There are currently just over 350 persons with some form of permission to remain in the State residing in State provided accommodation. This figure represents just over 7% of the total number of persons residing in State provided accommodation.

The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), which administers the system of accommodation for protection applicants, has always provided such persons with continued accommodation while they source their own accommodation. RIA is particularly mindful of the reality of the housing situation in the State and the pressures on the Community Welfare Service in respect of Rent Supplement or the City and County Councils in respect of Housing Assistance Payments and Housing Lists. That said, the provision of housing for persons coming out of the protection process has been incorporated in the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Following on from the McMahon report, my Department developed a guide to independent living for persons with status to provide practical assistance for them. The guide is available in all centres and has been published on the RIA website (www.ria.gov.ie) in a number of different languages. This was published in parallel with information sessions coordinated by the Citizens Information Bureau in accommodation centres which gave an opportunity for such persons to seek assistance and clarification on the services provided. The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), its centre managers, the Community Welfare Service (by way of provision of Rent Allowance), Citizens Information and those City and County Councils operating the Housing Assistance Payments link with such persons in accessing the appropriate supports and services, including in respect of sourcing and securing private accommodation.

In addition, following a call for proposals under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, a number of charities and NGOs were awarded funding for projects with the specific aim of providing assistance to those transiting from state provided accommodation to permanent homes in the community. I am confident that the services provided with this funding will prove of great assistance and benefit to all concerned.

Direct Provision System

650. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the implementation of the 175 recommendations of the McMahon report; the number of these recommendations that have been fully implemented, partially implemented and that remain unimplemented, respectively. [38332/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): *The Report of the Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers*, also known as the Justice McMahon report, was published in June 2015. Its recommendations have implications for a number of Government

Departments and services.

My Department has since published three progress reports on the implementation of its 173 recommendations; the first in June 2016, the second in February of this year and a third and final report in July of this year. All three reports are available to view on my Department's website www.justice.ie.

The final progress report shows that 133 recommendations have been reported as fully implemented and a further 36 are in progress or partially implemented. This represents a 98% full or partial implementation.

Asylum Applications

651. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of applications for asylum that are in the new single procedure application system under the International Protection Act 2015; the number of persons who have been processed within the six-month timeframe target; and the waiting times experienced by persons under the new system. [38333/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the International Protection Act 2015 was commenced on 31 December 2016 (commencement date). The 2015 Act introduced a single procedure which enables all grounds for seeking international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) or permission to remain in the State for other reasons to be examined and determined in one process. The new single procedure brings the State into line with protection processing arrangements in all other EU States and has replaced the previous multi-layered process with multiple bodies involved. Single procedure case-processing at first instance is now undertaken in the International Protection Office (IPO) of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and appeals in respect of the protection recommendations of the IPO are processed by the independent International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT).

As of 31 July 2017, there were 4,683 applications awaiting processing in the IPO. The vast majority of these applications were made before the introduction of the International Protection Act 2015 but were not finalised by the former Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) by the commencement date and hence must be processed by the IPO under the Transitional Provisions of the 2015 Act. Various categories of cases reverted to the IPO including asylum appeals transferred from the old Refugee Appeals Tribunal and asylum and subsidiary protection cases transferred from the old ORAC. This added significantly to the caseload of the new body.

The IPO also has responsibility for processing applications for international protection transferred to the State under the EU Relocation Programme.

In terms of processing, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that considerable progress has been made by the IPO in getting the new single procedure process up and running. This follows IPO staff concentrating in the initial months of the year on the necessary preparatory work including issuing correspondence to all transitional applicants with details of the new processing arrangements, the handling of some 2,600 returned Application for International Protection Questionnaires including the translation of questionnaires (some 50% of which require translation) and the scheduling of interviews etc. Furthermore, extensive training on the new procedures and processing arrangements has been delivered to staff in the IPO and supporting panel members (persons with legal qualifications who support International Protection Officers

in their functions).

I am advised that, as at 6 September, 2017, the IPO have finalised some 807 single procedure cases (including relocation cases) and 112 cases under the 2013 Subsidiary Protection Regulations. In addition, to date the IPO have conducted over 1,100 single procedure interviews (including in respect of relocation cases) and 67 interviews under the 2013 Subsidiary Protection Regulations. More than 240 additional interviews have been scheduled in the IPO for the coming weeks.

At the present time it is not possible to calculate an accurate current median processing time for international protection applications due to the different case types on hands which were returned to the IPO under the transition provisions of the 2015 Act. It is estimated, however, that cases in the transition categories (i.e. all cases in the process on commencement date) will be cleared by October 2018 based on current staffing levels. This is expected to be brought forward as additional staff as assigned.

The prioritisation of international protection applications in the context of the scheduling of interviews is provided for in the International Protection Act 2015 subject to the need for fairness and efficiency. I am advised that when the Application for International Protection Questionnaire (IPO 2) and other supporting documentation is returned by applicants, the IPO is scheduling applications for interview primarily on the basis of date of application (oldest cases first). However, certain categories of applicant are also being prioritised such as those from refugee generating countries such as Syria and unaccompanied minors. The IPO's approach to prioritisation has been agreed with the UNHCR and is available on its website: www.ipo.gov.ie.

The work of the IPO in supporting the international protection process is extensive and varied and includes the taking of applications, fingerprinting applicants, the issue of Temporary Residence Certificates, the processing of cases under the EU Dublin Regulation, the scheduling and undertaking of protection interviews, the organisation of interpretation and translation services, undertaking country of origin research, the preparation of statutory reports on protection and permission to remain and the issue of such reports. The IPO is also represented at appeals hearings before the IPAT.

Considerable additional resources have been allocated to the IPO to assist it in undertaking its statutory functions and reduce waiting times. In January 2017 there were 119 staff in the IPO. Over the period January to September 2017, 42 new staff were assigned to the IPO. The positive impact on waiting times for applicants as a result of the introduction of the single procedure will continue to accrue incrementally over the coming months and will become fully evident once the transition cases have been cleared.

Public Sector Staff Data

652. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual percentage of non-commercial State sponsored bodies' staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38366/17]

653. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual percentage of public service staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38389/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 652 and 653 together.

The following table outlines the percentage of women who are public servants in agencies and bodies under the remit of my Department which are non-commercial State sponsored bodies.

Year	Legal Aid Board	National Disability Authority	An Garda Síochána
2010	73%	66%	24%
2011	74%	68%	24%
2012	74%	70%	25%
2013	76%	69%	25%
2014	77%	69%	26%
2015	* Nil	70 %	26%
2016	* Nil	73%	26%
2017	* Nil	77%	26%

* In 2015, public service staff members in the Legal Aid Board were re-designated as civil servants.

Courts Service Data

654. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual Exchequer funding provided to the Courts Service in each of the past ten years and to date in 2017. [38445/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The funding to agencies under the remit of my Department is provided through the annual estimates process. The information in respect of the Courts Service Vote is set out in the following table.

The Gross Funding includes funding for Pay, Non-Pay Current and Capital. Net Funding is the Gross Funding less the Appropriations-in-Aid (income) element of the Courts Service Voted funds.

Annual Exchequer Funding to the Courts Service: 2007 to 2017

Year	Total Gross Funding	Appropriations in Aid	Total Net Funding
	€'000	€'000	€'000
2017	140,080*	47,828	92,252
2016	112,172	46,003	66,169
2015	107,965	47,815	60,150
2014	104,565	46,535	58,030
2013	104,959	46,635	58,324
2012	107,090	52,315	54,775
2011	112,126	51,461	60,665
2010	148,722*	46,519	102,203
2009	122,027	44,408	77,619
2008	136,195	28,935	107,260
2007	130,927	28,361	102,566

* Included in the 2010 and 2017 budgets is funding for the once-off up-front VAT payment in relation to PPP Projects.

Note: In 2016 additional funding of €2.5 million was provided for ICT and was included in the Gross Allocation.

Source: Revised Estimates Volume for the respective years.

Community Alert Programme

655. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the allocation towards the establishment of community safety programmes or text alert schemes. [38447/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will be aware that as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders, for example, the well-established Community Alert Programme and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme to name but a few.

Indeed, for the period 2014-2016, my Department provided in excess of €650,000 to Muin-tir Na Tíre for the administration of the Community Alert Programme. This funding covers the costs for the national operation of the Programme, including salaries for three of the five Regional Development Officers (the HSE fund the other two). The Development Officers play a key role in supporting the establishment and operation of local Community Alert and Text Alert groups.

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

Very important progress has been made under Operation Thor which has led to concentrated Garda activity with more than 80,700 targeted checkpoints nationwide, and in the region of 5,192 arrests connected to a range of offences which, in addition to burglary, have included handling stolen property, possession of firearms and drugs offences. Operation Thor has particularly targeted mobile gangs engaged in burglary and related crimes and it is encouraging to note that since the launch of the operation in November 2015, the burglary figures have shown a significant downward trend. Decreases of 30% in burglary were recorded in 2016 when compared to same period in 2015. This reflects the success of the concerted Garda drive against crime being implemented under Operation Thor.

Furthermore, Garda crime prevention and awareness measures under Operation Thor are complemented by the doubling of the funding being provided to support Community Crime Prevention, including Community Alert and Crimestoppers. Community partnership has been particularly evident in the success of the Garda Text Alert scheme. Since it was launched in September 2013, it has developed as an important crime prevention mechanism with over 700 local groups involving in excess of 130,000 subscribers and with an estimated 200,000 text

messages sent each month under the scheme. Every Garda Division, rural and urban, now offers the text alert service and An Garda Síochána has published guidelines to assist in the establishment and operation of local groups.

In September 2016, a new Text Alert rebate scheme, operated by Muintir na Tíre, was launched which provided a rebate for local groups operating the Garda Text Alert scheme, including many Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch groups. In response to that announcement, in the region of 473 valid applications were received from Text Alert Groups and all applicants have been paid in full.

I can assure the Deputy that funding for crime prevention initiatives remain under continuing review by the Department of Justice and Equality.

Garda Strength

656. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when there will be further graduations of probationer gardaí from Templemore in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38508/17]

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána. I am also informed that another 400 Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year - 200 in September and a further 200 in December - which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

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

Forensic Science Ireland Laboratory

657. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of contractors invited to tender for the construction of the new State forensics laboratory in Celbridge, County Kildare; when tenders must be returned for the project; when construction is likely to commence on the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38511/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The need for a new purpose built forensic science laboratory appropriate to the State's requirements is long-standing. The Deputy will be aware that the Government's capital plan 2016-2021 has allocated €45m

for the construction of the laboratory with work originally due to commence in 2019. However, some €6 million was provided in my Department's Vote for 2017 for a variety of enabling works, including electricity and gas connections, the installation of fibre line to the site and works to the main entrance. These works are well underway.

I hope that it will be possible in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan to secure the funding that will allow the construction of the building to commence and, that being the case, I would expect the new laboratory to be ready in 2020. The cost of construction and fit-out will only be known once the tendering process is complete

The Deputy will appreciate that the construction of the new Forensic Science Laboratory is being managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) on behalf of my Department. I am informed by OPW that, in accordance with normal procurement rules, expressions of interest from suitably qualified contractors were sought via eTenders and the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) on 4th April 2017. Following consideration by the assessment panel of responses received on 8 May 2017, a total of seven contractors were deemed suitable and will be invited to tender.

I am informed that the tender package is currently being assembled for issue shortly and that a return date of mid-November is anticipated. This being so, and subject to funding being made available under the mid-term review of the Capital Plan, a start on site in early 2018 is expected.

Crime Data

658. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures being taken by An Garda Síochána to categorise crime statistics in each county correctly. [38534/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will recall that on 25 July 2017, I published the Report of the CSO-led Expert Group on Crime Statistics. The Expert Group was established to specifically address six recommendations arising from the Garda Inspectorate Report on Crime Investigation 2014 which directly related to the compilation of crime statistics.

During the course of the Group's meetings, a number of new measures were implemented on the Garda PULSE database with the objective of improving data quality and these were outlined to the Group by An Garda Síochána. The Group was advised that PULSE 6.8 was released in November 2015. Among the enhancements outlined as part of this release was the introduction of a Victim Assessment screen which included the mandatory recording of data relating to the apparent motive for a crime incident, such as whether it has been motivated by domestic violence or by specific types of discrimination including by age, disability, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Furthermore, since the establishment of the Expert Group, a Liaison Group was set up between the Central Statistics Office and An Garda Síochána as a formal, high-level mechanism for consultation and communication between both organisations that will facilitate co-operation and ensure that both organisations can fulfil their respective statutory obligations for the production of crime statistics as set out in the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 and in accordance with the procedures and requirements of the Statistics Act, 1993. The Liaison Group will, inter alia, oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Group. In addition, a revised Memorandum of Understanding between the CSO and An Garda Síochána was signed in 2017.

The Deputy will be aware that the CSO recently announced they were deferring the release of the Quarterly Recorded Crime Statistics for Quarter 1 2017, which was due on 28 June 2017.

I am advised that this deferral arose on foot of An Garda Síochána's decision to extend their review of homicide statistics and, therefore, it was not possible to conduct the normal CSO data verification process in advance of the publication of new crime statistics.

It is important to note that these issues remain under close scrutiny by the Policing Authority, and that the Garda authorities have undertaken to provide further information to the Authority, as well as to the CSO. I also expect to receive further updates from the Garda authorities as this work is progressed. Given the Policing Authority's important oversight role, I am sure the Deputy will agree that it is entirely appropriate that this matter is the subject of careful examination and inquiry by the Authority.

We must bear in mind that issues with the consistent recording of crime data are not unique to this jurisdiction, and I am assured that there is continuing close engagement by the CSO with An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter and to support the ongoing improvements to our official crime statistics generally. The CSO has already carried out two detailed reviews of crime data quality, in 2015 and 2016, and I understand that further general reviews of crime data quality are planned. The CSO's work provides an important measure of re-assurance to support ongoing work to enhance the quality of the official crime statistics.

However, to be of further assistance to the Deputy, I have also sought a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter in case there is anything they wish to add to the above and I will contact the Deputy again should any additional details become available.

Crime Data

659. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the discrepancies between CSO data on crime statistics and statistics published under PULSE. [38535/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the CSO recently announced they were deferring the release of the Quarterly Recorded Crime Statistics for Quarter 1 2017. I am advised that this deferral arose on foot of a decision by An Garda Síochána's to extend their review of homicide statistics and, therefore, it was not possible to conduct the normal CSO data verification process in advance of the publication of new crime statistics.

I published the Report of the CSO-led Expert Group on Crime Statistics on 25 July 2017. The Expert Group was established to specifically address six recommendations arising from the Garda Inspectorate Report on Crime Investigation 2014 which directly related to the compilation of crime statistics.

During the course of the Group's meetings, a number of new measures were implemented on the Garda PULSE database with the objective of improving data quality and these were outlined to the Group by An Garda Síochána. The Group was advised that PULSE 6.8 was released in November 2015. Among the enhancements outlined as part of this release was the introduction of a Victim Assessment screen which included the mandatory recording of data relating to the apparent motive for a crime incident, such as whether it has been motivated by domestic violence or by specific types of discrimination including by age, disability, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Furthermore, since the establishment of the Expert Group, a Liaison Group was set up between the Central Statistics Office and An Garda Síochána as a formal, high-level mechanism for consultation and communication between both organisations. This will facilitate co-oper-

ation and ensure that both organisations can fulfil their respective statutory obligations for the production of crime statistics as set out in the Garda Síochána Act, 2005 and in accordance with the procedures and requirements of the Statistics Act, 1993. The Liaison Group will, inter alia, oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Group. In addition, a revised Memorandum of Understanding between the CSO and An Garda Síochána was signed in 2017.

While I am pleased to see the progress being made in relation to this report, I believe it is also important to note that issues with the consistent recording of crime data are not unique to this jurisdiction, and I am assured that there is continuing close engagement by the CSO with An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter and to support the ongoing improvements to our official crime statistics generally. The CSO has already carried out two detailed reviews of crime data quality, in 2015 and 2016, and I understand that further general reviews of crime data quality are planned. The CSO's work provides an important measure of re-assurance to support ongoing work to enhance the quality of the official crime statistics.

It is important to note that these issues remain under close scrutiny by the Policing Authority, and that the Garda authorities have undertaken to provide further information to the Authority, as well as to the CSO. I also expect to receive further updates from the Garda authorities as this work is progressed. Given the Policing Authority's important oversight role, I am sure the Deputy will agree that it is entirely appropriate that this matter is the subject of careful examination and inquiry by the Authority.

It should also be noted that the statutory position regarding the monitoring of the implementation of recommendations made in Inspectorate reports has changed. Section 117(A) of the Garda Síochána Act provides a role for the Policing Authority in monitoring the measures taken by An Garda Síochána to implement the recommendations contained in reports prepared by the Inspectorate, and in line with this provision the Authority has been requested to monitor the implementation of the 2015 Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland'.

Garda Stations

660. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations and their geographic location that are not computerised. [38536/17]

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

I am, however, informed by the Garda authorities that there are some 156 stations that are not connected to the Garda IT Network. For operational and security reasons the locations of these stations are not being released. Members in non-networked locations can contact the Garda Information Services Centre to provide relevant details to trained civilian call-takers who enter the details on the PULSE system.

The Deputy will be aware of the Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 which is intended to professionalise, modernise and renew An Garda Síochána to ensure that the organisation can meet present and future challenges. As part of the Programme, the matter of enhancing rural access to the Garda network by connecting non-networked sites to the network is being examined. This includes plans to introduce mobile technology solutions to enable operational Gardaí to access core information systems, including PULSE, while on duty and away from Garda stations.

Garda Strength

661. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí as of 31 August 2017 or the latest date available, by rank and gender, in tabular form. [38538/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner, that as of the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available the number of Gardaí was 13,301.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to him on receipt of same.

Garda Recruitment

662. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí recruited since 2014; and the gender breakdown of same. [38539/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and been assigned to Garda stations nationwide.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to him on receipt of same.

Garda Retirements

663. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí who have retired or left the force in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [38540/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Retirement of members of An Garda Síochána is governed by statutory provisions which set the mandatory retirement age for all members at 60 years of age.

Members of An Garda Síochána who joined the organisation prior to 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension once they have served for at least 30 years and they have reached 50 years of age. Members of An Garda Síochána who joined the organisation on or after 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension once they have served at least 30 years and have reached 55 years of age. A member has the option of continuing to serve until they reach 60 years of age subject to the Garda Commissioner being satisfied that the member is fully competent and available to undertake, and fully capable of undertaking, the duties of his or her position as a member of the Garda Síochána.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is well on course to be achieved. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I can assure the Deputy that projected departures from An Garda Síochána are kept under continuing review and the level of recruitment adjusted as necessary in order to achieve the desired strength.

The following table details the number of members who retired or left An Garda Síochána in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and 2017 as of 6 September 2017 as supplied by the Commissioner. These figures include Voluntary, Compulsory, Cost Neutral Early Retirement, Resignations, Deaths, Dismissals and Medical Discharges.

	Com	D/Com	A/Com	C/Supt	Supt	Insp.	Sgt	Garda	Total
2017*	0	0	3	3	4	12	39	97	158
2016	0	0	2	5	6	16	64	170	263
2015	0	0	1	4	11	14	83	169	282
2014	1	0	0	4	8	15	83	179	290

*as of September 2017

Garda Recruitment

664. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the next Garda recruitment campaign will be undertaken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38554/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This recruitment target is an ambitious one and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. The most recent recruitment campaign launched by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) on behalf of the Commissioner in May of this year again received a strong response with more than 5,000 applications received. It is expected that successful candidates from this campaign will start to enter the Garda College in the second quarter of 2018.

The precise timing of the next competition is under consideration by the Commissioner in conjunction with PAS and any announcement will be made in due course including on the PAS website (www.publicjobs.ie).

Garda Resources

665. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will assign additional resources to Tallaght Garda station to allow for further effective action to be taken in respect of the difficulties being experienced regarding the bus service to Tallaght west, whereby crime and antisocial behaviour are leading to threats to the bus service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38560/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) South Division on 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available was 541 with 22 Garda Reserves and 30 civilians, of whom 176 Gardaí are assigned to Tallaght Garda Station. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 96 whom were assigned to the DMR South Division. I am also informed that a further four hundred Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division including the DMR South Division in the coming years.

The Deputy will appreciate that, while I have no direct role in Garda strategies to tackle anti-social behaviour and criminal activity on public transport services in Dublin, I can assure the Deputy that I am in regular contact with the Commissioner about all aspects of policing and community safety with a view to ensuring that our cities and towns are safe for all.

More generally, there are a range of strong legislative provisions available to An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. The powers available to Gardaí support them in addressing anti-social behaviours, including the prevention of nuisance or annoyance to others and forestalling damage to property or a breach of the peace.

An Garda Síochána remains committed to tackling public disorder and anti-social behaviour

by working with communities to reduce this type of behaviour and enhance community safety. The Garda approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities, businesses and other stakeholders to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour.

Furthermore, the Garda National Model of Community Policing plays a key part in responding to crime by taking into account and responding to local conditions and needs. Clear objectives are set, such as high visibility in the community, ease of contact by members of the public, and enhanced support for crime prevention strategies. All Gardaí have a role to play in Community Policing in carrying out their duties. In addition, the National Community Policing Office, attached to the Garda Community Relations Bureau, captures best practice in community policing initiatives and disseminates these practices through its communication network.

An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021, published on 9 June 2016, places a strong emphasis on developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation and enhancing the current delivery model so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. It will result in the introduction of multi-skilled Community Policing Teams in every District. Community Policing Teams will be made up of Gardaí from a number of different units who will work with the local community to prevent and detect crime. Undoubtedly, the ongoing recruitment process will support all Garda activities and will enhance the provision of effective Community Policing throughout the country.

Protected Disclosures

666. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if it is accepted that a person (details supplied) made a protected disclosure relative to their employment with the Irish Prison Service; if his attention has been drawn to the findings outlined in a report (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this person continues to suffer verbal abuse from his seniors in the workplace; if the recommendation or findings have been acted upon; if he will take action to protect the person in line with the commitment in the protected disclosure legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38574/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers, which was dealt with in accordance with the protected disclosures policy in place, including an external review. The case is currently the subject of proceedings before the Workplace Relations Commission in accordance with the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 and it would not therefore be appropriate to comment at this time.

The Irish Prison Service Protected Disclosures Policy was adopted and approved on the 30 October 2015. The purpose of the policy, in line with the Protected Disclosures Act 2014, is to encourage all workers to raise internally concerns about possible wrongdoing in the workplace so that these concerns can be investigated.

In order to ensure that all staff understand their role in handling a protected disclosure, attendance at Protected Disclosure training was rolled out and was mandatory for all senior staff in the Irish Prison Service.

The Irish Prison Service Protected Disclosure Policy is due for review in Autumn 2017 and all aspects of the policy will be considered in the light of learnings over the past two years. Consideration of the matters contained and arising from the external review referred to by the Deputy will feed into the review.

The Irish Prison Service has recently committed to *the Integrity at Work Programme Membership* and the *Integrity at Work Pledge* with Transparency Ireland. By joining the *Integrity at Work Programme*, the Irish Prison Service is making a public commitment to fostering a workplace in which staff feel safe when speaking up about wrongdoing. As part of this programme, the Irish Prison Service is currently undergoing an Integrity at Work needs analysis with Transparency Ireland which will also feed into the review in Autumn 2017.

Garda Deployment

667. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in Tallaght and Rathfarnham Garda stations in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38580/17]

668. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new recruits allocated to Tallaght and Rathfarnham garda stations in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38581/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 667 and 668 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

The area referred to by the Deputy forms part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) South Division. I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the DMR South Division on 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 541 of which 62 and 174 were assigned to Rathfarnham and Tallaght Garda Stations, respectively. In addition 22 Garda Reserves and 30 civilians were also attached to the Division.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 96 of whom were assigned to the DMR South Division. I am also informed that a further four hundred Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment intro-

duced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the DMR South Division in the coming years.

For the Deputy's information I have set out below the information provided by the Commissioner in relation to the number Gardaí assigned to Rathfarnham and Tallaght Garda stations from 2014 to 31 July 2017 and also the number of new Garda recruits assigned to Tallaght and Rathfarnham Garda stations in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017.

There were no new recruits attested in 2014.

Number of Gardaí allocated to Tallaght and Rathfarnham Garda Stations 2014-2017

STATION	2014	2015	2016	2017*
Tallaght	170	176	179	174
Rathfarnham	72	69	64	62
TOTAL	242	245	243	236

*Up to 31 July 2017

Number of recruits assigned to Tallaght and Rathfarnham Garda Stations 2015-2017

STATION	2015	2016	2017
TALLAGHT	10	10	11
RATHFARNHAM			5

Garda Station Refurbishment

669. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to provide funding for the refurbishment of the public office in Malahide Garda station; the Garda stations scheduled for refurbishment in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38644/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close co-operation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The Deputy will be aware of the significant efforts being made by Government to enhance the working environment generally for members of An Garda Síochána and of the major investment that has been committed under the Capital Plan 2016-2021 to upgrade Garda premises, the Garda fleet and Garda ICT infrastructure.

The Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021 is an ambitious 5 year Programme that will benefit over thirty locations around the country and includes over €60 million of Exchequer funding as part of Government's Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 as well as a major Public Private Partnership project.

The Programme is based on agreed priorities established by An Garda Síochána and the Garda authorities are working in close co-operation with the OPW to deliver the projects.

While the Programme does not include provision for any significant building works at Malahide Garda station, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that an application has been made to the OPW for some refurbishment works to be undertaken at the public office at the station. I understand that a determination in relation to the matter will be made having due regard to the views of the OPW as to the feasibility of the proposal and available funding.

Question No. 670 answered with Question No. 600.

Visa Data

671. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of type 2 and 2A visas issued by the Garda north division in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38646/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it has not been possible to respond to the Deputy in the timeframe allowable. The matter is currently being examined and I will be in touch with the Deputy when further information is available.

Visa Data

672. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average processing time for long-stay visa applications here; the number of persons on waiting lists in this category; the area which has the highest number of applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38647/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that decisions regarding the grant or refusal of visas are made in a number of INIS Visa Offices overseas, the INIS Visa Office in Dublin, and at Embassies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which process certain visa applications under delegated sanction from my Department.

The processing times for visa decisions are published on the Visa pages of each Visa Office and Embassy website. The following table sets out the dates up to which applications received in the Dublin Visa Office have been processed, as well as the number currently awaiting decision.

Purpose of Visa Application	Date Received in Dublin	Number Awaiting Decision
Employment	31/08/2017	11
Study	19/07/2017	265
Join Family (National Legislation)	06/03/2017	451
Join Family (Free Movement Directive)	See below	See below

It should be noted that target times for the processing of visas are established as a business target, reflecting the detailed and often complex assessment required to be carried out in relation to applications, and do not constitute a legal obligation. The processing time for visas in each location is determined by a number of factors, such as the volumes and complexity of applications, peak application periods and the resources available. While every effort is made to process such applications as quickly as possible, processing times inevitably vary as a result of

these factors.

In relation to applications under the terms of the Free Movement Directive (2004/38/EC), the Deputy may wish to note that there has been an exponential increase since the second quarter of 2015 in the number of such applications. This has given rise to a current caseload in the region of 7,800 applications overall, which have to be assessed very carefully to ensure that any fraudulent applications or potential abuses of the Directive are detected and dealt with appropriately. Legal proceedings in relation to a number of similar such applications are currently before the courts, and accordingly, the Deputy will appreciate that I am limited in what I can say on the matter.

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

Garda Resources

673. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 33 of 12 July 2017, if he will ensure that additional Garda resources are provided for the Cavan and Monaghan division due to the extra difficulties that arise for policing a Border region; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns in relation to the reduction in Garda personnel over recent years in areas such as the former Ballyconnell Garda district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38682/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. In addition, as you will appreciate, in order to deliver an effective policing service, it is essential that Garda management have the flexibility to deploy Garda resources to meet operational policing needs and address critical issues as they arise. For this reason, the number of Garda available in any one Garda Station on a particular day is subject to the operational requirements of the overall Division.

I am further informed by the Commissioner that, as of 31 July 2017, there were 324 Garda with 12 Garda Reserves and 37 civilians attached to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. When appropriate, the work of local gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

The Deputy will also be aware that there is close and ongoing co-operation between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI on all aspects of policing, with a particular focus on combating security threats and cross-Border crime. The Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable of

the PSNI, who are responsible for operational policing co-operation, have repeatedly emphasised the scope and the value of the close and high quality co-operation between the two police services in combating crime, protecting community safety and saving lives. The two police services operate a joint Cross-Border Policing Strategy which has as its aims to improve public safety throughout Ireland, to disrupt criminal activity and to enhance the policing capability of both police services on the island.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 26 of whom were assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. I am also informed that a further four hundred Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Cavan/Monaghan Division in the coming years.

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

Brexit Issues

674. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the development of sectoral response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38698/17]

675. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38714/17]

676. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation [38730/17]

677. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38746/17]

678. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38762/17]

679. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38778/17]

680. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38810/17]

682. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38842/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 674 to 680, inclusive, and 682 together.

The International Policy Division within my Department has been assigned responsibility for co-ordinating the Department's work as it relates to matters concerning UK withdrawal from the EU. The Division is headed-up by an Assistant Secretary and comprises a team in Dublin and a team based in the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels, currently consisting of thirteen officers in total. This figure includes an additional post to the Permanent Representation to support the Brussels based aspects of the forthcoming negotiations which was filled in July 2017, and an additional post in the Dublin team filled last month. Complementing this, six senior officers from each of the key areas in the Department (who are in turn supported by relevant staff) have been selected to make up a cross-divisional working group to focus on the key negotiating issues. In addition, the senior management team of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) have a particular focus in relation to the movement of people within the Common Travel Area and other immigration-related matters relevant to Brexit.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach" published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a co-ordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotia-

tions is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;

- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;

- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;

- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;

- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

In so far as the issues relevant to my Department are concerned, continued co-operation with the UK on criminal and civil justice matters, and in the maintenance of the Common Travel Area are key priorities. The significance of the Common Travel Area and the benefits it confers across Irish society are well understood. At a sectoral level, it is also clearly important that we maintain the closest possible co-operation in the field of criminal justice, and that there are efficient mechanisms to deal with cross-Border civil, commercial and family law matters, so that members of the public and businesses can have legal certainty and protection in cross Border disputes. Our analysis of these important issues is ongoing.

We do not envisage any diminution in the joint commitment to security and police operational co-operation between the UK and Ireland. Our respective agencies work closely together and that will continue.

Brexit Staff

681. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit-related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38826/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The International Policy Division within my Department has been assigned responsibility for co-ordinating the Department's work as it relates to matters concerning UK withdrawal from the EU. The Division is headed-up by an Assistant Secretary and comprises a team in Dublin and a team based in the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels, currently consisting of thirteen Officers. This figure includes two recent additional posts, in the Permanent Representation to support the Brussels based aspects of the forthcoming negotiations, and in the International

Policy Division in Dublin.

Complementing this, six senior officers from each of the key areas in the Department (who are in turn supported by relevant staff) have been selected to make up a cross Divisional working group to focus on the key negotiating issues.

Currently there are no vacant Brexit related roles. The possibility that additional staffing resources may be required to work on Brexit related issues has been flagged in the Department's Workforce Plan. This is being kept under review and weekly progress updates are provided to the Department's Management Board on the analysis and preparations under way.

Question No. 682 answered with Question No. 674.

Brexit Issues

683. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38858/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The primary stakeholders engaging with the justice related aspects of the UK's withdrawal from the UK are internal to the Department of Justice and Equality and meet on a regular basis in a variety of different formats to discuss a wide range of relevant issues. In addition to this day to day engagement, six senior officers from each of the key areas in the Department (who are in turn supported by relevant staff) meet as a cross-divisional working group which focuses on the key negotiating issues and identifies areas where further analysis and preparations are necessary.

Brexit Data

684. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38890/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Research and analysis of the justice specific issues arising in response to the UK withdrawal from the EU are a main priority across all relevant sections of the Department of Justice and Equality. In addition, there is regular and ongoing engagement with other relevant Departments concerning the cross-Government aspects of these issues. Weekly progress reports are provided to the Department's Management Board on the analysis and preparations under way and I am regularly briefed on the full range of issues being considered.

Departmental Expenditure

685. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38906/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Estimates process

for 2018 is ongoing and the details of the allocation for the Departments Vote will not be finalised until Budget Day. It is understood that where any savings are identified during the Estimates process they can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space.

Garda Deployment

686. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the nine gardaí who are leaving a Dublin station (details supplied) in September 2017 will be replaced in view of ongoing serious crime and persistent antisocial behaviour in areas served by this station. [38985/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources. I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

The area referred to by the Deputy forms part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Division on the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 667 with 46 Garda Reserves and 38 Civilians also attached to the Division. Of the Gardaí, 220 were assigned to Ballymun District with 119 in Ballymun Station. When appropriate, the work of the Division is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 90 of whom were assigned to the DMR North Division respectively. I am also informed that a further four hundred Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda District, including the Ballymun District in the coming years.

Specifically in relation to serious crime and antisocial behaviour in the area concerned I am informed that the Ballymun STRIVE Pilot Project was set up in 2014 by representatives from the Local Drugs Task Force, An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, the Irish Prison Service, Dublin City Council and the Ballymun Network. This project aims to address the behaviour of certain key individuals identified as adversely affecting the quality of life of people living in an area of Ballymun. It became operational in January 2015. It sought to tackle concerns arising from serious offending and anti-social behaviour, drug dealing related activity and general public order problems identified within the community of Ballymun. The pilot was envisaged to last for two years. I am informed that year one outcomes were promising with decreases in recorded anti-social crime and drugs related offences in the target area, which were greater than those seen in the rest of Ballymun. For individuals targeted the numbers of offences decreased from 82 in the year before the pilot commenced to 47 offences in 2015.

This pilot continued into year two and a final evaluation of the project is almost complete. It is hoped that the initial analysis, which showed that there were notable decreases in crime in the STRIVE area, will remain the case following the final evaluation. I look forward to reading the recommendations contained therein.

Child Protection

687. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will direct the Reception and Integration Agency, RIA, to update its commercial contract for the awarding of tenders to operate direct provision centres to ensure that the RIA and his Department are informed immediately when an internal investigation commences on the issues of child protection and-or sexual abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39000/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): All current contracts and any subsequent contracts awarded following a tendering process will require the contractor to fully implement the Reception and Integration Agency's (RIA) Child Protection Policy.

The Policy clearly sets out the obligations on a contractor and contains procedures in the event of an allegation concerning staff, service providers and visitors being made. Where an allegation is made, the procedure requires the Designated Liaison Person in the accommodation centre to inform centre management/contractor and the Child and Family Services Unit in RIA and to ensure, as far as is possible, that all necessary measures are taken to ensure child safety. In such cases, the parents/guardian of the child should be kept informed at all times of actions taken in relation to the matter. In addition, any allegations of child abuse, whether against a parent, other resident, or member of staff must be simultaneously reported to the local TUSLA social work team as well as the Child and Family Unit in RIA. TUSLA remains the organisation with statutory responsibility for investigating and assessing child abuse. Out of hours or when a concern is very serious, centre management and staff are advised to contact An Garda Síochána.

All policy documents and codes of practice that contractors are obliged to implement, including RIA's Child Protection Policy, are available on the RIA website at [www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/Policy Documents](http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/Pages/Policy%20Documents).

Policing Issues

688. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide

an update on the work of the Commission on the Future of Policing; the number of times it has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39002/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland was established by Government earlier this year to undertake an independent, comprehensive examination of all aspects of policing including all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána (community safety, security and immigration). It is also to examine the full range of bodies that have a role in providing oversight and accountability for their activities; the Policing Authority, the Garda Inspectorate, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, my Department and the Government.

The terms of reference require the Commission to bring forward proposals addressing five themes:

- structures and management arrangements required for the most effective delivery of policing (including all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána);
- appropriate composition, recruitment and training of personnel;
- culture and ethos of policing;
- appropriate structures for oversight and accountability, and;
- legislative framework for policing.

The terms of reference also call on the Commission to have regard to:

- existing and emerging issues identified as key challenges for Ireland's model of policing;
- best practices in the policing models of other countries focused towards greater effectiveness and efficiency, and fostering public confidence in policing;
- previous reports concerning policing in Ireland;
- any specific challenges to delivering consistent structural and cultural reform in policing.

The Commission is chaired by Ms Kathleen O'Toole and comprises 11 other members drawn from Ireland and from overseas with wide ranging expertise. Members were selected due to their track record in their respective fields. As well as serving as the current Chief of Seattle Police Department, Ms O'Toole previously served as Boston Police Commissioner and Chief Inspector of the Garda Inspectorate. She was a member of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland (Patten Commission) established in 1998 to inquire into policing in Northern Ireland. The Commission is supported by a full-time secretariat.

The terms of reference require the Commission to consult widely in the course of its work, including with the public and civic society and any other bodies or individuals it considers appropriate. In line with this requirement, the Commission has launched a consultation process via its website and is encouraging individuals and organisations to share their views on all issues relevant to the Commission's terms of reference as an important input to the Commission's report.

The Commission is to report by September 2018 and it may, in accordance with its terms of reference, bring forward immediate proposals and rolling recommendations for implementation that it considers are required to be addressed in the short-term and in advance of its final report.

The Commission has met to date on four occasions since it was established. Discussions

have also been held with other bodies including the Minister and officials from the Department of Justice and Equality, the Garda Inspectorate, the Policing Authority and An Garda Síochána. Similar discussions and consultations with organisations key to the future of policing in Ireland will continue over the coming months. The Commission is seeking submissions from individuals and organisations on all issues relevant to its terms of reference. Further details on this, and on the approach being undertaken by the Commission in progressing its work can be found on the Commission website - www.policereform.ie.

Garda Deployment

689. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number and rank of gardaí allocated to the Ballymun Garda station; and the comparative figures for September 2013 to 2016. [39011/17]

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

I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division on the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 667 with 46 Garda Reserves and 38 Civilians also attached to the Division. Of the Gardaí, 220 were assigned to Ballymun District with 119 in Ballymun Station. When appropriate, the work of the Division is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,200 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 90 of whom were assigned to the DMR North Division. I am also informed that a further four hundred Garda recruits are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that the number and rank of Gardaí allocated to the Ballymun station in each of the years 2013 - 2016 and to 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available, is as set out in the following table.

BALLYMUN GARDA STATION 2013-2017

YEAR	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	TOTAL
2013	94	18	3	2	1		118
2014	88	19	4	2	1		114
2015	97	19	4	3	1		124
2016	93	17	4	2	1		117
2017*	98	15	4	1	1		119

*Up to 31 July 2017.

Wildlife Control

690. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the number of seals in an area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36806/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Although seals are protected under the Wildlife Acts, there are provisions for a licence to be issued to prevent individual seals damaging fishing nets. I understand that officials of my Department have recently had discussions about such a licence with fishermen in the affected area.

National Raised Bog Management Plan

691. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the national raised bog special area of conservation, SAC, management plan has been finalised (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37261/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Raised Bog SAC (Special Area of Conservation) Management Plan 2017-2022 sets out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed.

The Plan is currently undergoing final copy-editing, translation and design with a view to its publication in the coming weeks.

Deer Hunting

692. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to introduce a hunter competence assessment programme, HCAP; the details regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37525/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department grants some 4,600 licences annually to hunt deer during the Open Season which is the period during which deer can be legally shot under licence. The Open Season for deer operates generally from 1 September to 28 February, depending on the species and gender of deer.

In March 2015 my Department along with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine published the report *Deer Management in Ireland – A Framework for Action* which includes policy recommendations relating to deer conservation and management that could be pursued by both Departments and stakeholders. An Irish Deer Management Forum was established to implement the various actions listed in the Report. The Forum itself comprises

representatives from the main stakeholder areas such as landowners, forestry, hunting and conservation organisations as well as representatives from both Departments.

The Forum has issued a number of recommendations since its establishment including a recommendation that mandatory certification of deer hunters should be introduced on a phased basis over a five year period from 1st January 2018 for existing licensed deer hunters. In order to gauge the extent of current accreditation amongst hunters, my Department amended the current deer hunting application form to obtain this information which is currently being examined by my Department. In this year's deer hunting application form guidance notes, deer hunters were informed of the Deer Management Forum's proposal in relation to certification.

Údarás na Gaeltachta

693. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number employed in companies supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta based on data in the annual employment survey on an annual period over the 2010 to 2016, by county, in tabular form. [38296/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the following table.

I should remind the Deputy that the information provided below is already in the public domain and is available in the published annual reports of Údarás na Gaeltachta and on the organisation's website.

Full-time employment in Údarás na Gaeltachta assisted companies.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Dún na nGall	2,007	1,867	1,878	1,942	1,942	2,058	2,090
Maigh Eo	601	675	711	728	685	665	640
Gaillimh	2,805	2,754	2,730	2,741	2,835	2,879	2,932
An Mhí	185	190	161	167	186	239	211
Ciarraí	737	730	706	683	671	665	671
Corcaigh	615	633	610	577	586	614	675
Port Láirge	124	121	137	131	148	148	129
Iomlan/ Total	7,074	6,970	6,933	6,969	7,053	7,268	7,348

Living Wage Introduction

694. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated cost of implementing a living wage of €11.70 for all persons directly employed or in agencies funded by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36847/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, based on current staffing and pay levels, the estimated additional annual cost of introducing an hourly wage of €11.70 for all persons, employed both directly in my Department and in agencies under its aegis and who are not already paid that amount or more, would

be in the order of €266,000.

National Museum

695. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of artefacts in the National Museum of Ireland that are catalogued; the outstanding number to be catalogued; the number pertaining to An Gorta Mór, the Irish Famine 1845 to 1849; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36917/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): This is an operational matter for the National Museum of Ireland. As a statutory body under the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997, I have no responsibility for the day to day running of this organisation.

Commemorative Events

696. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the preparations her Department is making for the 2018 National Famine Commemoration Day; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36918/17]

697. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the National Famine Commemoration Day Bill 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36919/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 696 and 697 together.

The National Famine Commemoration Day Bill reached Second Stage earlier this year. A date will be arranged for the scheduling of the Committee Stage of the Bill following this year's National Famine Commemoration, which takes place on Saturday, 30 September 2017 in Ballingarry, County Tipperary.

Details regarding the preparations for the 2018 event will be announced in due course.

Departmental Staff Data

698. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of political staff employed in her Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within her Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36947/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details are provided below regarding political staff paid from my Department's Vote whose appointments are coterminous with my term of office as Minister or coterminous with the terms of office of the Ministers of State at my Department. Details are also provided of civil service staff working in my offices and Minister of State offices in the period concerned. Staffing numbers in my office and the Ministers of State offices are consistently maintained within the staffing limits set out in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform *Guidelines on Staffing of*

Ministerial Offices. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established in June 2011, this was reconfigured in 2016 to become the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and further reconfigured in July 2017 to become the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

2015

Office of Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Parliamentary Assistant*	1	Personal Secretary to Minister/Minister of State Scale
Personal Secretary*	1	Personal Secretary to Minister/Minister of State Scale
Special Adviser	1	Principal Officer Scale (Non-PPC)
Special Adviser	1	Principal Officer Scale (PPC)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff-Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	Higher Executive Officer Scale
Executive Officer	1	Executive Officer Scale
Clerical Officer	3	Clerical Officer Scale

Civil Service Staff-Constituency Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Scale

Office of Minister of State (Gaeltacht)

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Parliamentary Assistant*	1	Personal Assistant to Minister/Minister of State Scale
Personal Secretary*	0.25	Personal Secretary to Minister/Minister of State Scale
Personal Secretary	0.75	Personal Secretary to Minister/Minister of State Scale
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff-Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	Executive Officer Scale
Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Scale

Civil Service Staff-Constituency Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Temporary Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale

*With effect from the 32nd Dáil, Personal Secretaries and Personal Assistants are paid by the Houses of the Oireachtas as Secretarial Assistants and Parliamentary Assistants respectively, under the scheme for Secretarial Assistance.

2016

Office of Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Special Adviser	1	Principal Officer Scale (PPC)
Special Adviser	1	Principal Officer Scale (PPC)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff – Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	Higher Executive Officer Scale
Executive Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale
Clerical Officer	3	Clerical Officer Scale

Civil Service Staff - Constituency Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale
Temporary Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale

Office of Minister of State (Gaeltacht)

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff – Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	Executive Officer Scale

Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Scale
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Office of Minister of State (Regional Economic Development)

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff – Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	Higher Executive Officer Scale
Executive Officer	1	Executive Officer Scale
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale

2017

Office of Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Special Adviser	1	Principal Officer Scale (PPC)
Special Adviser	1	Principal Officer Scale (PPC)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff -Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	Higher Executive Officer Scale
Executive officer	2	Executive Officer Scale
Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Scale

Civil Service Staff - Constituency Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale
Temporary Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale

Office of Minister of State (Gaeltacht)

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
Civilian Driver	1	Civilian Driver (single point salary scale)

Civil Service Staff- Private Office

Grade/Role	No.	Salary Scale
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Private Secretary	1	Higher Executive Officer Scale
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Scale

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Payments

699. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when compensation will be paid to a person (details supplied) under the voluntary bog purchase scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37154/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The individual referred to in the Deputy's Question applied to sell his interest in land in a raised bog natural heritage area under the voluntary bog purchase scheme, administered by my Department.

The 2014 Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. Arising from this review, 46 natural heritage areas (including parts of 7 sites) are scheduled for de-designation as it has been judged that the contribution of these sites to the attainment of the national conservation objective for raised bog is expected to be marginal and/or restoration would be prohibitively expensive for the conservation benefits achieved. Domestic turf cutting may continue on these sites, while large scale or commercial turf cutting will continue to be regulated through other consent systems.

The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 provides for the de-designation of these sites. This Bill is proceeding through the necessary stages in the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The natural heritage area referred to in the Deputy's Question is one of those scheduled for de-designation. Consequently, as already advised to the individual concerned, my Department will not be proceeding with the purchase of the interest that he applied to sell.

Architectural Heritage

700. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of plans to upgrade an historic building in Castleblayney (details supplied); if works carried out will be in keeping with the historic era of the building; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37159/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The building referred to by the Deputy is in local authority ownership. I understand the local authority is working to assess the potential to redevelop and find a long term sustainable use for the property. As part of this process, a public consultation was held by the local authority in July 2017.

My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets. My Department has no role in the allocation of funding by the other body mentioned for the restoration of this building.

Road Improvement Schemes

701. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress made to date in 2017 on agreeing method statements with Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, and Galway County Council for the upgrading of the N59 road between Maam Cross and Oughterard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37465/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A revised method statement for the ground investigation works for the Maam Cross to Bunnakill section of the N59 was submitted by Galway County Council to my Department on 28 June 2017 and this was approved on 29 June 2017. It is understood that Galway County Council is at present assessing tenders for the ground investigation works and hopes to have a contractor on the ground by the end of September/early October. On 6 September 2017 my Department received a draft method statement from the Council for archaeology testing on the Maam Cross to Bunnakill section and this was approved by my Department the following day, 7 September 2017.

Architectural Heritage

702. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the grant schemes available to refurbish a building (details supplied). [37478/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets. The building referred to by the Deputy is on the Record of Protected Structures for the relevant local authority. As such there is a duty on the owner/occupier to protect it from becoming endangered whether through damage or neglect. The building is also a recorded monument, and any proposal to carry out work to the building would require two months notification under the National Monuments Acts.

My Department provides grant aid to for conservation and repair works to Protected Structures (i.e. structures on the local authority Record of Protected Structures).

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures. Both schemes are administered via the local authorities and Circulars setting out the terms and conditions of the schemes are available on all local authority websites, and my Department’s website. Owners of certain designated structures can avail of tax relief under Section 482 of the Taxes Consolidation Act.

The Heritage Council, which is funded by my Department, also provides grants for works to heritage buildings. In the context of a particular building, the best advice for the owner may be to contact the Architectural Conservation Officer in the relevant local authority who will be able to advise and assist on the above as applicable.

Hare Coursing

703. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will provide a copy of the licences she has issued for the netting and tagging of hares for the purpose of hare coursing in 2017. [37591/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Copies of the licences issued by my Department to the Irish Coursing Club allowing their affiliated clubs to capture and tag hares for the 2017/18 coursing season are available on the website of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department at <https://www.npws.ie/licences/hare-coursing>.

Tionscadail Oidhreachta

704. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil céimeanna glactha ag a Roinn i gcomhar le Comhairle Contae na Gaillimhe chun caomhnú agus cothabháil a dhéanamh ar shéadchomhartha náisiúnta (sonraí tugtha) agus an damáiste a rinne na stoirmeacha in 2014 á chur san áireamh; cén plé a rinneadh leis an bpobal áitiúil faoin gceist; má tá céimeanna glactha chun é a chaomhnú, céard iad féin; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [37683/17]

705. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén uair a chuirfear freagra substaintiúil ar chomhfhreagras a chuir duine i mo dháilcheantar chuici (sonraí tugtha); cén fáth a bhfuil moill ar an bhfreagra. [37684/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Tá i gceist agam Ceisteanna Uimh. 704 agus 705 a thógáil in éineacht.

Ar an suíomh seo tá reilig atá á cosaint faoi Alt 12 d'Acht na Séadchomharthaí Náisiúnta (Leasú), 1994. Rinneadh damáiste mór don séadchomhartha, atá lonnaithe ar choimín, mar gheall ar stoirmeacha in 2014, agus nochtaiódh cnámha ársa daonna lena linn.

Thug Seirbhís Séadchomharthaí Náisiúnta mo Roinne cuairt ar an láithreán cúpla uair ag an am agus, i gcomhar le hOifigeach Oidhreachta Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe, chas siad le hionadaithe pobail, geallseabhóirí an choimín ina measc. Tuigim gur aontaíodh go ndéanfaidh an Chomhairle Contae agus mo Roinn suirbhé seandálaíochta i gcomhar lena chéile ar an méid den reilig atá fágtha, faoi réir thoiliú d'aon ghuth na ngeallsealbhoirí sin, go gcuirfeadh na hionadaithe pobail iarratas chuig an gComhairle Contae ar mhaoiniú deontais don suirbhé agus go n-íocfadh mo Roinn na costais a bhainfeadh le haon aisghabháil oistéiseandálaíochta agus scrúdú den reilig a d'eascródh as.

Cuireadh in iúl dom nach bhfuil aon chumarsáid bhreise faighte ag Comhairle Contae na Gaillimhe ná ag an Roinn ó shin i dtaca leis an suirbhé beartaithe ná iarratas ar chúnamh deontais. É sin ráite, tá an dá dhream seo ar fáil go fóill le dul i mbun ple arís leis na geallsealbhoirí ábhartha agus tá iarrtha agam ar mo Roinn, i gcomhar leis an Oifigeach Oidhreachta, teagmháil a dhéanamh arís leis na hionadaithe pobail lena raibh siad i dteagmháil roimhe.

Maidir le ceist an chomhfhreagrais le duine i dToghcheantar an Teachta, tá sé curtha in iúl dom gur sheol mo Roinn freagra substaintiúil amach ar an 22 Lúnasa 2017.

Film Industry Development

706. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if consultation has taken place with her Department regarding the proposed sale of a film studio (details supplied); if so, the dates of such consultations; the outcome of such consultations in view of the strategic importance of the studio in the future development of the film industry both nationally and for the mid-east region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37872/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The facility to which the Deputy refers is owned jointly by Enterprise Ireland in conjunction with other private entities. My colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation has responsibility for Enterprise Ireland. However, I am aware of the issue and my Department has been in contact with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in relation to the matter.

That Department has indicated that, at the appropriate time, any proposal requiring a decision on the sale of Enterprise Ireland's shareholding would be reviewed by Enterprise Ireland from a commercial and legal perspective in consultation with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Innovation which, in turn, has confirmed that it will consult my Department on any decision regarding the ownership of the shareholding.

Action Plan for Rural Development Implementation

707. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the launch of a pilot scheme which is planned to encourage persons to take up residential occupancy of premises in towns and villages as part of the action plan for rural development has commenced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37934/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The relevant functions in respect of rural and regional development and related matters transferred to my colleague the Minister for Rural and Community Development on 27 July last.

Architectural Heritage

708. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the supports, financial or otherwise, her Department has given to a local authority for a building (details supplied); the amount the local authority applied for; the amount it received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37982/17]

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

Financial support is provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings, including the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund.

In 2015, the local authority sought funding in the amount of €60,000 for conservation work to be carried out on a Gate Lodge located at the entrance of the building referred to by the Deputy. In this regard, my Department provided a contributory grant of €40,000 through the Structures at Risk Fund to the local authority for this specific project.

Architectural Heritage

709. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if funding has been sought from her Department to improve a building (details supplied); her plans regarding same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37983/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with regard to the protection and management of our architectural heritage, is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets. There are a number of ways in which my Department acts in respect of supporting possible heritage sites/buildings deemed to be at risk.

Financial support is provided by my Department through a number of structured schemes for the conservation and protection of heritage buildings, including the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund. Both these schemes are administered through the local authorities.

No application for funding has been received by my Department for works to the building in 2017. I am advised, that prior to my appointment as Minister, an application was received under the Structures at Risk Fund in 2012 however, due to resource constraints, it was not possible to fund the project at the time. Should an application be submitted in the future, my Department will consider it.

Brexit Staff

710. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37988/17]

711. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of staff deployed full-time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38004/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 710 and 711 together.

As I advised the House in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 316 of 4 July 2017, a Working Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level and composed of officials from across the Department was established last year to deal with Brexit issues. This Working Group is supported by the Department's EU Coordination Unit which is also responsible for managing those issues relating to Brexit that fall within my Department's remit.

The Department also has a full time dedicated attaché assigned to Ireland's Permanent Representation in Brussels. This officer is a member of the Department's Working Group and is also fully involved in the preparations by Ireland's diplomatic team in Brussels.

These arrangements are being kept under review and will be enhanced if required in the coming period.

Construction Costs

712. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms her Department employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38020/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department's capital expenditure is largely concentrated on enterprise supports, refurbishment projects in the National Cultural Institutions, National Parks, Waterways network and various other capital grant schemes. Inflation measures are of more value in the management of multi-annual construction programmes.

My Department seeks at all times to ensure value for money in the delivery of its individual capital supports. Where appropriate, my Department is sanctioning authority for certain projects as set out under the Public Spending Code and ensures value for money through a range of measures including ensuring compliance with public procurement procedures in partnership with the relevant contracting authorities and the Office of Government Procurement. Capital supports are provided in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Circular 13/2014 on the Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds, which provides guidance to Government Departments on ensuring that all Exchequer funds, regardless of the method of distribution, are accounted for and properly managed.

Departmental Funding

713. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department has received a request for additional funding for a project (details supplied) in Cork city in addition to the €12 million already committed by the Government; the process in order to assess such funding requests; the timeframe for same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38114/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The project referred to by the Deputy is being developed and managed by Cork City Council and the Council is responsible for the delivery of the project. My Department allocated €12 million to the City Council towards the cost of the project. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements in relation to major capital projects.

Cork City Council have indicated that the overall project costs have risen from €65 million up to between €67 million and €73 million. However, the Council and contractor have not yet finalised the full cost due to design changes required to provide full multi-functionality for the centre. My Department is continuing to liaise with Cork City Council on a regular basis in relation to the project.

Departmental Agencies Staff Recruitment

714. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has commenced the process to fill the position of director for Creative Ireland; and the process through which this vacancy will be filled. [38138/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I intend to fill the post of Director of Creative Ireland through an open competition, managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). I am advised that applications for the position will be sought shortly.

Departmental Expenditure

715. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her Department's capital expenditure for 2016 and 2017, by subhead. [38139/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): All expenditure within my Department's Vote is subject to an ongoing internal verification and monitoring process to ensure the best use of available financial resources. Adjustments may fall to be made between subheads as part of this process and all figures are subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. Outturn figures on a subhead by subhead basis are therefore only made available in the Annual Appropriation Accounts which are published and made available on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General – I am advised that the 2016 Appropriation Accounts for my Department and all Government Departments are due to be published on this website shortly.

Details of expenditure, at Vote level, in respect of my Department and all Government Departments are published by the Department of Finance. Details of gross voted expenditure for 2016 are available at <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/exchequer-statements/>

Details of provisional capital expenditure figures in respect of my Department at Vote level as of 31 July 2017 are available at:

<http://www.finance.gov.ie/updates/monthly-revenues-and-expenditures-of-all-subsectors-of-general-government-for-july-2017/>

Public Services Card

716. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she or bodies and agencies under the remit of her Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38144/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A Public Services Card is not required for access to any of the services currently provided by my Department or any body under its aegis. I am also advised that there are currently no proposals to make services or payments dependant on the mandatory use and production of the public services card.

Departmental Expenditure

717. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the cost her Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38219/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The cost to my department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees and the financial institutions to which the payments were made are detailed in the following table.

Financial Institution	2012 (€'s)	2013 (€'s)	2014 (€'s)	2015 (€'s)	2016 (€'s)	2017 YTD (€'s)

Visa	94.72	98.10	98.10	98.10	98.10	79.05
Elavon Financial Services	3,290.00	4,889.20	4,081.71	6,580.66	5,682.85	3,460.55
An Post	-	8.70	9.50	11.10	6.60	2.90
Bank of Ireland	89.87	322.69	344.99	196.53	129.91	127.30
Allied Irish Bank	-	-	12.68	-	-	-
Ulster Bank	-	-	13.30	19.71	-	-

It should be noted that the payments to Elavon Financial Services are to facilitate credit/debit card payments by visitors to National Parks and the National Archives of Ireland. The Office of Government Procurement (OGP) has a centralised Framework Agreement with Elavon Financial Services.

Departmental Staff Data

718. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of men and women, respectively, in her Department who hold posts (details supplied). [38220/17]

719. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of women and men, respectively, employed in her Department, in tabular form. [38221/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 718 and 719 together.

I am advised that the following tables show the number of men and women in my Department who hold the posts identified, and the total number of men and women in my Department.

Post	Male	Female	Total
Secretary General	0	1	1
Second Secretary	0	0	0
Deputy Secretary	0	0	0
Assistant Secretary	4	0	4
Principal (PO) and equivalent	16	5	21
Assistant Principal (AP) and equivalent	48	42	90
Total	68	48	116

Department Staff	Male	Female	Total
Total	316	327	643

Departmental Funding

720. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of discussions with Cork City Council for further funding of the Cork event centre; the discussions which have taken place to date; the number of times she or her officials have met Cork City Council officials and the contractor on the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38245/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Cork Event Centre is a project being developed and managed by Cork City Council and the Council is responsible for the delivery of the project. My Department allocated €12 million to the City Council towards the cost of the Centre. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to ensure compliance with all relevant requirements in relation to major capital projects.

Cork City Council have indicated that the overall project costs have risen from €65 million up to between €67 million and €73 million. However, the Council and contractor have not yet finalised the full cost due to design changes required to provide full multi-functionality for the centre. My Department is continuing to liaise with Cork City Council on a regular basis in relation to the project.

Departmental Staff Data

721. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the annual percentage of non-commercial State sponsored bodies' staff under the remit of her Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38359/17]

722. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the annual percentage of public service staff under the remit of her Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38382/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 721 and 722 together.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht was established in June 2011, this was reconfigured in 2016 to become the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and further reconfigured in July 2017 to become the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The information sought by the Deputy is provided in the following tables in respect of the period from 2011 onwards.

1. Public service employees under the remit of the Department

Year	% Female
2011	43
2012	44
2013	44
2014	45
2015	46
2016	47
2017 (September)	46

2. Employees of non-commercial bodies under the aegis of the Department

Year	% Female
2011	43
2012	43
2013	43
2014	44
2015	45
2016	45
2017	44

Údarás na Gaeltachta

723. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the allocation to Údarás na Gaeltachta in each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form, distinguishing between capital and current allocation. [38438/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The information sought by the Deputy is outlined in tabular format as follows:

Year	Capital €m	Current (Admin) €m	Current (Programmes) €m	Total €m
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	20.910
2017	8.187**	8.958	3.250	20.395

* An additional capital allocation of €2.4m, arising from savings elsewhere in the Department's Vote, was secured for an tÚdarás in 2016 and is included in the figure provided.

** An additional capital allocation of €1.5m, arising from savings elsewhere in the Department's Vote, has been secured for an tÚdarás to date in 2017 and is included in the figure provided.

Culture Ireland

724. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the allocation to Culture Ireland in each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form, distinguishing between capital and current allocations. [38439/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The allocations to the Culture Ireland Division of my Department from 2011 to 2017, all of which are current, are outlined in the following table.

2011	€6.997m	€3.997m core, plus €3m once-off provision for Imagine Ireland initiative
2012	€4.31m	Including EU Presidency funds of €0.77m

2013	€3.997m	Including EU Presidency funds of €0.811m
2014	€2.5m	
2015	€2.5m	
2016	€5m	Including €2.5m for I Am Ireland Centenary Programme
2017	€3.5m	

Departmental Expenditure

725. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the allocation to the national cultural institutions in each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form, distinguishing between capital and current allocations (details supplied). [38440/17]

726. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the allocation to the Arts Council in each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form, distinguishing between capital and current allocations. [38441/17]

727. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the allocation to the Irish Film Board in each of the years 2011 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form, distinguishing between capital and current allocations. [38442/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 725 to 727, inclusive, together.

The allocations for the National Cultural Institutions, referred to by the Deputy, together with the Irish Film Board and the Arts Council for the years 2011 to 2017, and that spent to date in 2017 are as set out in the following tables.

Year	National Museum of Ireland		
	Current	Capital	Total
2011	€12,240,000	€2,000,000	€14,240,000
2012	€11,585,000	€1,000,000	€12,585,000
2013	€10,769,000	€905,000	€11,674,000
2014	€10,960,000	€958,000	€11,918,000
2015	€11,346,000	€958,000	€12,304,000
2016	€11,162,000	€958,000	€12,120,000
2017	€11,743,000	€1,108,000	€12,851,000
2017 paid to date	€7,557,951	€648,000	€8,205,951
Year	Chester Beatty Library		

	Current	Capital	Total
2011	€2,475,000	€104,000	€2,579,000
2012	€2,378,000	€220,000	€2,598,000
2013	€2,229,000	€182,000	€2,411,000
2014	€2,125,000	€175,000	€2,300,000
2015	€2,225,000	€175,000	€2,400,000
2016	€2,229,000	€175,000	€2,404,000
2017	€2,346,000	€175,000	€2,521,000
2017 paid to date	€1,142,000	€87,000	€1,229,000
Year	Crawford Art Gallery		
	Current	Capital	Total
2011	€1,075,000	€275,000	€1,350,000
2012	€1,033,000	€220,000	€1,253,000
2013	€1,032,000	€165,000	€1,197,000
2014	€968,000	€162,000	€1,130,000
2015	€1,089,000	€162,000	€1,251,000
2016	€1,072,000	€162,000	€1,234,000
2017	€1,176,000	€162,000	€1,338,000
2017 paid to date	€881,640	€121,500	€1,003,140
Year	Irish Museum of Modern Art		
	Current	Capital	Total
2011	€5,216,000	€877,000	€6,093,000
2012	€5,112,000	€280,000	€5,392,000
2013	€4,617,000	€331,000	€4,948,000
2014	€4,387,000	€320,000	€4,707,000
2015	€4,487,000	€320,000	€4,807,000

2016	€4,493,000	€320,000	€4,813,000
2017	€4,748,000	€320,000	€5,068,000
2017 paid to date	€3,651,000	€240,000	€3,891,000

It should be noted that the figures for the National Gallery do not include the funding provided in respect of the recent restoration of the historic wings of the Gallery.

Heritage Council Funding

728. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the allocation to the Heritage Council in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form, distinguishing between capital and current allocations. [38443/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The funding allocation to the Heritage Council in each of the years 2011 to 2017, both capital and current allocations and representing the Vote (B.3) of the previous Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2011 – 2016), Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2016-17) are set out in the following table.

These figures exclude any additional allocations provided under the Environment Fund which is separate to my Department's core allocations and administered within the Vote of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Heritage Council 2011 - 2017

Total Vote B.3		
2011 Capital	2011 Current	
€3,000,000	€2,992,000	€5,992,000
2012 Capital	2012 Current	
€1,969,000	€1,500,000	€3,469,000
2013 Capital	2013 Current	
€1,781,000	€2,665,000	€4,446,000
2014 Capital	2014 Current	
€1,688,000	€2,805,000	€4,493,000
2015 Capital	2015 Current	
€1,688,000	€3,055,000	€4,743,000
2016 Capital	2016 Current	
€1,688,000	€3,555,000	€5,243,000
2017 Capital	2017 Current	
€2,688,000	€3,566,000	€6,254,000

National Parks and Wildlife Service

729. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is considering reopening of the NPWS farm plan scheme; the number of persons who participated in the scheme when last opened; and the total funding expended on the programme. [38479/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department operates a farm plan scheme, which

has the primary objectives of testing, on a relatively small scale, bespoke measures for nature conservation on farmland. The scheme incentivises farmers in particular instances, to go above and beyond their statutory requirements.

There are currently 39 landowners operating under the Farm Plan Scheme, and the total amount paid to farmers in the scheme in 2016 was €446,500. The final expenditure for 2017 has not yet concluded.

While my Department has a lead role in relation to the implementation of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, significant funding is provided through the Rural Development Programme operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to assist farmers in meeting the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives. It is essential, in my view, that, wherever possible, use is made of opportunities for co-funding from the EU in providing payments to farmers who own lands subject to such designations. Agri-environment schemes such as the new GLAS scheme have provided and will provide a range of supports, including payments in respect of Natura 2000 sites, to tens of thousands of farmers. Natura 2000 designation affords eligible farmers priority entry to GLAS and there are additional financial supports under GLAS+ and locally-led European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs).

Land Acquisition

730. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will report on the purchase by the State of the section of the Dublin Mountains; if the purchase has been completed; her plans for the land; the difference the State's purchase of the land makes with regard to the future use of the land and the future of the general Dublin Mountains area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38590/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the purchase last year of an area of 4,900 acres (or 1,983 hectares) at Glenasmole in the Dublin Uplands. My Department completed the purchase of this area, known popularly as the Featherbeds, at a cost of €800,000 in December 2016. This land has been added to Wicklow Mountains National Park, expanding the total size of this National Park to some 22,000 hectares. The lands referred to are thus being managed as part of Wicklow Mountains National Park.

The Featherbeds are an important area for nature conservation and for public amenity. Their acquisition at a cost of approximately €163 per acre represents excellent value for the state, not just in terms of value for money but also in terms of the amenity potential, conservational benefits and environmental gains. The purchase underpins the Government's on-going commitment to the preservation of our natural heritage for future generations of citizens and visitors alike to enjoy. This outcome is the culmination of a constructive engagement between the Department and NAMA and addresses a long-standing strategy to align key environmental assets.

As the lands in question are located in a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA) there are already constraints and obligations placed on landowners, as well as the State included, on how the lands are used. While the lands will be primarily managed for Nature Conservation, other uses such as recreation will be considered where compatible with the Park's Nature Conservation objectives. Given the high conservation value and sensitivity of the Blanket Bog and Heathland habitats provision of high volume recreational uses with visitor facilities and other supporting infrastructure is unlikely. The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department will work with Dublin Mountains Partnership to manage this new acquisition, reflecting the on-going commitment of all stakeholders to improve the

recreational potential of this area whilst ensuring the highest standards of nature conservation.

In addition, the legal rights and burdens such as Grazing, Sporting and Turbary rights held by individuals have to be respected and will be considered within the management options available to the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Brexit Issues

731. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the development of sectoral response plans for Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38690/17]

732. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38706/17]

733. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including threats and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38722/17]

734. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the scenario planning that has been conducted by her Department for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38738/17]

735. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38754/17]

736. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38770/17]

737. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the funds that have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38802/17]

738. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of vacancies in her Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38818/17]

739. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit [38834/17]

740. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with her Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38850/17]

741. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by her Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38882/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 731 to 741, inclusive, together.

The comprehensive document “Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union: The Government’s Approach” published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government further increased its strategic oversight of Brexit by assigning dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government’s National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in the comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government’s continuing work to ensure that Ireland’s interests are reflected in the EU’s approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland’s strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland’s wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new ten-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

In relation to the work undertaken by my Department with regard to Brexit, I would refer the Deputy to my replies to Parliamentary Question No 923 of 20 June and to Parliamentary Question No 257 of 12 July.

To date, my Department has not sought additional staffing or funding resources in relation to Brexit. As I have previously advised the House, a Working Group, chaired at Assistant

Secretary level and composed of officials from across the Department was established last year to deal with Brexit issues. This Working Group is supported by the Department's EU Co-ordination Unit which is also responsible for managing those issues relating to Brexit that fall within my Department's remit.

The Department also has a full time dedicated attaché assigned to Ireland's Permanent Representation in Brussels. This officer is a member of the Department's Working Group and is also fully involved in the preparations by Ireland's diplomatic team in Brussels.

These arrangements are being kept under constant review and will be enhanced as required. My Department and I will continue to participate in, and contribute to, preparations for Brexit.

Departmental Expenditure

742. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38898/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Details of the financial allocations for my Department for 2018 will be made available as part of the Budget Estimates 2018 which will be published on Tuesday, 10 October. While it is too early at this point in time to accurately forecast the full end of year outturn for my Department for 2017, I can advise that all current funding is expected to be expended in full and no significant capital savings are envisaged at present. All expenditure within my Department's Vote will continue to be carefully monitored between now and year-end to ensure the best use of all available financial resources.

Care of the Elderly

743. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his views on the Citizens' Assembly recommendation that resources for the care of older persons should be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37820/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Homecare is an increasingly important part of the supports we offer to older people, and will continue to increase in importance into the future, as our aging population grows.

Government policy is to promote care in the community for older people so that they can continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible and long-term nursing care should be a last resort after home support and other community based supports have been exhausted. Under this Government that emphasis is being strengthened.

The overall funding for Services for Older People has increased to €765 million in 2017, with about €373 million available for homecare. This additional funding is aimed at allowing people to continue to live in their own homes and at facilitating discharge of older people from acute hospitals and the HSE has set a target to deliver 10.57 million home help hours, 16,750 home care packages and 190 intensive homecare packages this year. Demand for home care services is rising as more people are supported in their own home and there are challenges in managing home care budgets. There is no doubt that the resources available for homecare are less than we need to meet demand and the Programme for Partnership Government commits to

increasing funding for these services.

Direct Provision System

744. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the health, social care and psychological supports in place to address the specific needs of those living in the direct provision system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37831/17]

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.

General Practitioner Contracts

745. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the measures he has put in place for the unwinding of FEMPI in view of the fact that it applies to general practitioner GMS fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38518/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As a consequence of the severe difficulties arising from the economic and fiscal crisis of recent years, between 2009 and 2013 a number of reductions were applied under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (FEMPI) to the fees and allowances paid to healthcare professionals, including GPs who provide services under the GMS scheme.

There have been significant developments in general practice service in recent years, with more services being made available to our citizens and additional financial support provided by the HSE. Developments include a universal GP service for all children under six years and all persons over 70 years, the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of Care for adult GMS patients with Type 2 Diabetes, an enhanced support framework for rural GPs and a revised list of special items of service to encourage the provision of more services in the primary care setting. Additional funding of over €100 million per annum has been provided to general practice to support the roll-out of these initiatives.

I recognise that it will, over time, be necessary to invest further in primary care services while at the same time ensuring best value for such additional spending. As such, I am examining the avenues that could be taken in relation to private contractors, having regard for the need to ensure best value for public spending and the Government's commitment to continue to develop and strengthen primary care services.

Medical Card Administration

746. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the persons responsible for auditing or monitoring the deaths of medical card holders against the names on general practitioner lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37381/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) is responsible for providing reimbursement services to primary care contractors for the provision of health services to members of the public in their own community, including GPs contracted to provide services to eligible persons under the General Medical Services Scheme. As previously outlined to the Deputy, a number of channels exist through which the

Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) receives notice of the death of a medical card or GP visit card holder. These include:

- Notification through the Death Event Publication Service (DEPS) via a monthly file;
- Notification through the local Community Health Offices;
- Notification through the National Medical Card Unit contact centre, where clients' families provide information;
- Notification via letters/returned cards from clients' families;
- Notification from Nursing Homes;
- Notification from GPs.

Payments to GPs in respect of services provided to persons under the GMS scheme are terminated once the notification of a person's death is recorded. In circumstances where amounts have been paid to GPs for periods after the last day of the month in which a person has died, the PCRS makes appropriate adjustments to the monthly capitation payment made to GPs to balance any such overpayments.

It should be noted that the PCRS/National Medical Card Unit business processes are underpinned by internal control procedures, which are subject to review by the HSE Internal Audit Division. Additionally, reviews of various business processes within the PCRS/National Medical Card Unit are conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General on an annual basis.

Should the Deputy be aware of a specific instance where an overpayment has occurred in relation to a deceased patient which she believes should be investigated, she would be welcome to submit such information to the Department of Health or directly to the PCRS.

General Practitioner Contracts

747. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if a new general practitioner contract will be finalised soon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37812/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The Programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

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 six's and over 70's, the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of Care for adult GMS patients with Type 2 Diabetes and enhanced supports for rural GPs. The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is under way and officials from my Department

and the HSE meet with GP representatives on a regular basis.

I understand that the discussions taking place are wide ranging and definitely ambitious in their scope. I think it is important to acknowledge that, as with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, these engagements take 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. While there will be challenges 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. I look forward to continued ongoing positive engagement with GP representatives in the months ahead.

Hospital Appointments Status

748. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** 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. [36773/17]

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

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

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

Occupational Therapy

749. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting lists for occupational therapy appointments for children with autistic spectrum disorder (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36774/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Applications

750. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if he will approve an application for the fair deal scheme by a person (details supplied); and if the scheme can increase the percentage that they will make to the scheme in order to pay the retrospective debts to the nursing home. [36777/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

751. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) at South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital, Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36779/17]

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.

Respite Care Services Availability

752. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the status of short-term respite care available to persons in County Meath; and if there has been recent changes or planned changes to the way in which respite care is delivered in County Meath. [36782/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Provision

753. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn

to the fact that persons in County Meath have been instructed to find respite care in surrounding counties such as Cavan and Westmeath in view of the fact that the service has been discontinued in County Meath. [36783/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Staff

754. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding recruiting mental health nurses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36796/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

755. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36797/17]

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.

HIQA Issues

756. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of revised HIQA mental health regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36798/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Care Packages Administration

757. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken to clear the home care waiting lists; the amount of extra funding provided; the likely timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36799/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

European Health Insurance Card

758. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if a person who travels to Northern Ireland and becomes ill and undergoes surgery in hospital in Northern Ireland is entitled to have all costs covered by the European health card E111; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36800/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under EU Regulations, all persons ordinarily resident in the EU are entitled to apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC certifies that the holder has the right to receive emergency healthcare during a temporary stay in any EEA country as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland. This right is guaranteed to all persons who are covered by the public healthcare system of these countries. The European Health Insurance Card holder has the right to receive necessary treatment in the host Member State's public healthcare system on the same terms and at the same cost as nationals of the State concerned.

As the administration of the European Health Insurance Card comes under the remit of the HSE, my Department has asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

Mental Health Services Provision

759. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish children's mental health beds in the mid-west region; when they are likely to be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36802/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

760. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will reconsider the decision not to reimburse a drug (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36805/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for

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

Health Services Provision

761. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding sleeves for a prosthetic leg; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36807/17]

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

762. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the need for a full time general practitioner service for Monasterevin, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36811/17]

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

Health Care Policy

763. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing free contraception, in view of the Citizens Assembly recommendations in relation to the provision of contraception on the public health service and the upcoming discussion of this at the Special Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution; his views regarding the policy on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36834/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The HSE has advised my Department that in the absence of the collation of information required to make an estimate along the lines requested by the Deputy, an estimate of such cost is not possible.

I have great regard for the important body of work with which the Special Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution has been charged - namely to consider the report of the Citizens' Assembly and to recommend to the Oireachtas the policy direction it should consider on the issue of the Eighth Amendment.

I will not be pre-empting the deliberations of the Committee, but look forward to its report in due course.

Maternity Services

764. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health his views on the reasons for the reported dramatic increase in the rate of caesarean sections (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36835/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to this particular query, I have

asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Maternity Services Provision

765. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the reported withdrawal of funding for breastfeeding support (details supplied) by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36836/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive are totally committed to increasing breast feeding rates in Ireland.

National health policy, including the Healthy Ireland Framework, the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026, the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 and the recently published National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 all emphasise the importance of supporting mothers who breastfeed as well as taking action to increase breastfeeding rates in Ireland.

The recent National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 re-affirmed the commitment to advance public support of breastfeeding, and includes an action to extend provision for breastfeeding breaks under employment legislation (currently available to mothers of children under 6 months).

Regarding the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) issue, in 2016 the HSE commissioned a research team at TCD to undertake a review of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. One of the key findings of the Review was that there was no difference in breastfeeding rates in hospitals that had achieved the Baby Friendly designation, and those that hadn't achieved designation. In fact, while the Initiative has been in place for 20 years, only 9 of the 19 maternity hospitals have achieved the Baby Friendly designation. This Review highlighted the need for a revised model of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.

Following completion of the Review, the HSE initiated engagement with The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and other stakeholders on developing a revised model. While the HSE has made the decision to pause the existing initiative and it is not being funded for 2017.

The HSE are currently progressing the development of a revised model, working with the National Women and Infants Programme, the HSE Health and Wellbeing Division, the HSE Lead Midwife and other key stakeholders. The revised model will continue to support the implementation of the WHO/UNICEF 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, which is the basis of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. The revised model is expected by the end of the year and will be rolled out in 2018.

A wide range of other actions are underway in implementing the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020. These include:

- Improved Governance and health service structures;
- Breastfeeding training and skills development;
- Health service policies and practices;
- Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum; and
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.

Details of specific actions can be seen in the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020 on the HSE website *breastfeeding.ie* and here is the link <https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf>.

Psychological Services

766. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to appoint the full complement of clinical child psychologists in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36840/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Psychological Services

767. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide drop-in psychology services in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36841/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Ambulance Service

768. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason paramedics are not on emergency similar to their colleagues in An Garda Síochána and the fire brigade. [36860/17]

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

Maternity Services

769. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health his plans to have gestational diabetes covered under existing or new health schemes in order that costs are not incurred on expecting mothers with conditions associated with pregnancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36864/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are currently no plans to make specific provision for gestational diabetes under any new or existing health scheme. However, there are other supports available for access to health products available such as the Drug Payment Scheme (DPS) and the General Medical Scheme (GMS) that would assist patients with gestational diabetes.

Under the Drug Payment Scheme, no individual or family pays more than €144 a month towards the cost of approved prescribed medicines. The scheme significantly reduces the cost burden for families and individuals with ongoing expenditure on medicines.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be entitled to a medical card. In the assessment process, the HSE can take into account medical costs incurred by an individual or a family.

Ambulance Service Response Times

770. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources can be provided to improve ambulance response times in County Monaghan in view of the circumstances outlined in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36875/17]

789. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources can be provided to improve ambulance response times in County Monaghan in view of the circumstances outlined in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36942/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 770 and 789 together.

I wish to express my sympathies to the family of the person concerned.

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been undertaking a significant and ongoing reform programme, to reconfigure the management and delivery of pre-hospital care services. This programme will ensure a clinically driven, nationally co-ordinated system, supported by improved technology. I am fully conscious of the need for a multi-annual programme of phased investment in ambulance manpower, vehicles and technology, in that regard €7.2m additional funding was provided in 2016 for NAS including €2m in development funding. This year, an additional sum of €3.6m has been made available which includes €1m to fund new developments.

With regard to the specific incidents raised by the Deputy, as these relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

771. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hearing test at University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36888/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

772. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when home help hours will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36898/17]

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.

Maternity Services

773. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he is cutting funding for the baby-friendly hospital initiative; if so, the reason for such a decision; if he will reverse the cuts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36899/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive are totally committed to increasing breast feeding rates in Ireland.

National health policy, including the Healthy Ireland Framework, the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026, the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 and the recently published National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 all emphasise the importance of supporting mothers who breastfeed as well as taking action to increase breastfeeding rates in Ireland.

The recent National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 re-affirmed the commitment to advance public support of breastfeeding, and includes an action to extend provision for breastfeeding breaks under employment legislation (currently available to mothers of children under 6 months).

Regarding the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) issue, in 2016 the HSE commissioned a research team at TCD to undertake a review of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. One of the key findings of the review was that there was no difference in breastfeeding rates in hospitals that had achieved the Baby Friendly designation, and those that hadn't achieved designation. In fact, while the initiative has been in place for 20 years, only 9 of the 19 maternity hospitals have achieved the Baby Friendly designation. This Review highlighted the need for a revised model of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.

Following completion of the Review, the HSE initiated engagement with The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and other stakeholders on developing a revised model. While the HSE has made the decision to pause the existing initiative and it is not being funded for 2017.

The HSE are currently progressing the development of a revised model, working with the National Women and Infants Programme, the HSE Health and Wellbeing Division, the HSE Lead Midwife and other key stakeholders. The revised model will continue to support the implementation of the WHO/UNICEF 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, which is the basis of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. The revised model is expected by the end of the year

and will be rolled out in 2018.

A wide range of other actions are underway in implementing the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020. These include:

- Improved Governance and health service structures;
- Breastfeeding training and skills development;
- Health service policies and practices;
- Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum; and
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.

Details of specific actions can be seen in the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020 on the HSE website *breastfeeding.ie* and here is the link <https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf>.

Medical Card Eligibility

774. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider exempting wards of court funds in the calculation of means for a medical card in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36902/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no proposals at present to exempt Ward of Court funds from the medical card financial assessment.

However, every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. In certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information and documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

Health Services Staff Training

775. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the State provides training for therapeutic management of violence within psychiatric care; if not, the name of the company; the name of the institution in which it provides training, in tabular form; if a private company provides this training, the service level agreement for this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36906/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medical Card Data

776. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of over 70s GP only cards in circulation by local health office as of 30 June 2017. [36914/17]

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 Staff Data

777. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed directly by the HSE as home care workers; the number of home care workers employed by the HSE in each county; the tendering process involved in the outsourcing of care work to private agencies; the number of agencies providing home care services; the number employed as home care workers by these agencies; the amount the HSE provides to these agencies per hour of work, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36916/17]

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

Pharmaceutical Sector

778. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when he plans to commence a public consultation on a national biosimilars strategy further to his announcement of same in February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36924/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I recently announced the opening of a public consultation on biosimilar medicines. This consultation will inform the development of Ireland's first National Biosimilar Medicines Policy, with the aim of increasing the use of these more cost-effective medicines in Ireland.

The consultation paper is available online at <http://health.gov.ie/consultations> and the closing date for submissions is 22 September 2017.

Mental Health Services Data

779. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of clinical posts that were in place for south Dublin, Dún Laoghaire and north Wicklow CHO for mental health services in each of the years 2014 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36925/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Staff

780. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the estimated time needed to fill vacancies for mental health professionals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36926/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Data

781. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds closed in each CHO area; the number which have been closed to date in 2017; his plans to mitigate the impact of these closures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36927/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff

782. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address staff shortages in each CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36928/17]

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

Mental Health Services Data

783. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for a child and adolescent mental health service appointment in County Wexford; the number waiting zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months, nine to 12 months and more than 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36929/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Records

784. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the amount of income generated from fees in each voluntary and public hospital in 2015 and 2016 respectively for the provision of medical records; the number of requests processed in each hospital; the number of records released under the Freedom of Information Act 2014 in each, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36930/17]

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

Hospital Records

785. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health if publicly funded hospitals must provide personal medical records by request under the Freedom of Information Act 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36931/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Generally, access to one's medical records should be provided routinely and administratively, having regard to privacy, confidentiality and the public interest. An application may be made in writing to the appropriate service or agency providing sufficient information (date of birth, current and previous addresses, date of contact with the specific services etc.) to help in locating records.

People may also access their medical records, from publicly funded hospitals, under the Freedom of Information Act, 2014. They may apply in writing to the public body that holds the records and for medical card holders, that public body is the Health Service Executive (HSE). Patients of the public system may also be entitled to their medical records under the Data Protection Acts 2003 and 2008 or by 'discovery' in the course of court proceedings.

People who visit their G.P. privately or attend a non-HSE funded or private hospital may access their records under the Data Protection Acts or by court order.

Hospitals Building Programme

786. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the contracts which have been awarded between 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 to carry out building, construction and or structural works at Letterkenny University Hospital; the names of the successful tender; the project costs; the dates on which contracts were awarded; the dates on which works commenced; the dates works were completed in respect of each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36932/17]

787. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the contracts awarded between 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 to carry out building, construction and-or structural works at Letterkenny University Hospital whereby, following completion of the project, it was later discovered that additional works, corrective measures and or remedial action was required to be carried in order to remedy, correct or repair flaws, faults and or complications which later arose with a project; the name of the successful tender in each case; the corrective measures subsequently required; the costs incurred by same and by whom; the name of the company later called upon to carry out said corrective measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36933/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 786 and 787 together.

As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects including the awarding of contracts, the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to contracts awarded between 2009 to 2016 and to date in 2017 for capital works carried out at Letterkenny University Hospital.

Hospitals Car Park Charges

788. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the cost of parking at each

public hospital here; the revenue generated in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by hospital, by year, cost and revenue generated, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36941/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is a significant demand for car parking at all hospitals. Consequently, the efficient management of parking spaces and traffic flow on hospital campuses is of crucial importance. This is to ensure on-going availability of parking spaces; free flow of traffic on campus; unobstructed access for emergency vehicles at all times; proper use of spaces designated for drivers with disabled permits; and proper use of spaces designated as drop off points near the hospital entrance.

The HSE (Health Service Executive) has advised that it does not have one single contract to provide parking services at all hospitals. Instead each hospital has a unique arrangement which reflects its specific circumstances.

Arrangements for car parking generally is an operational matter for the HSE. The HSE has advised that it does not provide guidelines on hospital parking and each hospital/hospital group implements their own guidelines.

Hospitals which charge parking fees are very cognisant of the financial implications of parking costs for patients and their families particularly those with long-term illnesses. Consequently, a maximum daily fixed parking charge has been introduced in some hospitals, thus capping this expense. I understand that some hospitals also provide reduced rate parking rates for long-term patients and visitors for whom the payment of the full rate would cause hardship. The HSE has advised me that it keeps hospital parking charges under review.

In response to the particular queries raised, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 789 answered with Question No. 770.

Ambulance Service Response Times

790. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the longest response for the ambulance service for calls from the Killarney area by month in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36945/17]

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

Departmental Staff Data

791. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisors, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36955/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of myself and the Ministers of State in my Department is set out below:

Grade	2015		2016		2017 to date	
	No. of Staff	Salary	No. of Staff	Salary	No. of Staff	Salary
Personal Assistant	1	€54,490	*		*	
	1	€46,485				
Personal Secretary	2	€46,934.87	*		*	
Special Advisor	1	€91,716	1	€94,521	1	€62,027.82
	1	€99,370.04	1	€89,906	1	€42,486.09
	1	€87,258	1	€79,401	1	€56,628.34
			1	€76,647	1	€55,816.76
Civilian Driver	4	32,964.72	10	€32,964.72	8	€32,964.72
Constituency Office	1**	€35,919	0		1**	€964.61

*The Oireachtas now looks after the employment and pay of these grades.

** 2 x Clerical Officers seconded from Local Authority Sector.

HSE Staff Recruitment

792. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address hiring issues within the HSE (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36962/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

793. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36963/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

794. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents seen by CAMHS in each of the years 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017, by community health organisation area, in tabular form. [36969/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Provision

795. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the mental health services available to public patients in each primary care centre in tabular form. [36970/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Staff

796. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of permanent whole-time equivalents and the post title of each working in each of the CAMHS teams for each of the community health organisation areas. [36971/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Respite Care Services Provision

797. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason for his decision to privatise the HSE respite care service in County Sligo; when the tender for the privatised service in County Sligo will progress; the planned date for completion; and his further plans to privatise public respite care services. [36972/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospitals Building Programme

798. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 700 of 26 July 2017, the details of the site master plan for the St. James's Hospital

campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36973/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

799. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [36976/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

800. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [36977/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

801. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [36978/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

802. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [36979/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy

803. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Cork on a waiting list for occupational therapy; the number awaiting occupational therapy services for up to 12 months, 24 months and 36 months and over, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36981/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

804. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who presented for mental health services to HSE facilities in County Cork in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of persons that presented for mental health services to HSE facilities with a residential address in County Cork in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36982/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Occupational Therapy

805. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Kerry on a waiting list for occupational therapy; the number awaiting occupational therapy services for up to 12 months, 24 months and 36 months and over, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36983/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

806. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who presented for mental health services to HSE facilities in County Kerry in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of persons that presented for mental health services to HSE facilities with a residential address in County Kerry in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36984/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Services

807. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 891 of 17 May 2016, the number of persons with diabetes type 1 who are clinically indicated for insulin pump therapy; his plans to resource the necessary nurse specialists and dieticians to a hospital (details supplied) to provide local management of patients on insulin pump therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36985/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Patient Data

808. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have been referred to Dublin or Cork from University Hospital Waterford for assessment and therapy, by age and gender, in the past five years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36986/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

809. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the person or organisation that makes the decision on whether insulin pump therapy is appropriate and clinically required for a person with type 1 diabetes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36987/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have

asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Card Data

810. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the estimated yearly cost of providing free sanitary products (details supplied) to women with medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36989/17]

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

Hospital Services

811. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that are waiting for a dose adjustment for normal eating, DAFNE, carbohydrate counting course for adult diabetic patients attending University Hospital Waterford; the length of time they have to wait for that course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36992/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

812. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 898 of 17 May 2016, if an examination of the service to provide a permanent consultant physician in acute medicine in endocrinology has been undertaken at University Hospital Waterford; if a permanent second endocrinologist will be provided at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36993/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

813. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when University Hospital Waterford will be allocated an adult dietician; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36994/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

814. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list to see an endocrinologist at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36995/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have

asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

815. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36999/17]

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

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

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

Health Services Provision

816. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for existing type 1 diabetes patients being called back to see the diabetes consultant; the recommended number of reviews and visits per year; when people can expect to be called back after their last visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37001/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

817. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a required hip operation will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37002/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond

to you directly.

Health Services Provision

818. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if required chiropody services can be facilitated for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37004/17]

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

Health Services

819. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a capacity report will be finalised on a person (details supplied). [37005/17]

821. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason a family of a person (details supplied) was not informed that an independent advocate had been assigned to the person. [37008/17]

822. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in sourcing an alternative suitable placement for a person (details supplied). [37009/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 819, 821 and 822 together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

820. **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. [37007/17]

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.

Questions Nos. 821 and 822 answered with Question No. 819.

Hospital Appointments Status

823. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37011/17]

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

Drugs Payment Scheme

824. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he will reduce the €144 maximum charge on the drugs payment scheme; the status of his plans to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual co-payment on the drugs payment scheme as committed to in the programme for government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37012/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual co-payment on the Drugs Payment Scheme and reducing prescription charges for medical card holders. I intend to consider the Drugs Payment Scheme threshold in the context of the health commitments in the Programme for Government, and having regard to the funding available.

Long-Term Illness Scheme

825. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the likely timeframe for a decision regarding the addition of the FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system for diabetes patients to the long term illness reimbursement list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37013/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

826. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a knee operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37015/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Staff

827. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the capacity of staffing levels for CAMHS personnel in County Kerry; the number of personnel employed within CAMHS in County Kerry; if there are positions vacant; if so, the number of positions; the length of time for which each position has been vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37017/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Data

828. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and young persons seen by CAMHS County Kerry in 2016 and to date in 2017, during and out of office hours respectively; the number of children and young persons who were referred to adult services because no underage services were available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37018/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Services Provision

829. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding support for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37019/17]

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.

Autism Support Services

830. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the services available to persons with autism spectrum disorder, ASD, located in counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Laois and Offaly; the number of occupational therapists, psychologists and speech and language therapists that are employed in those counties; the availability of each to those affected by ASD; if there is a waiting list for each of the services; if so, his plans to deal with same; his further plans to improve the services required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37020/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

ment is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Complaints Procedures

831. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if the complaints made by a person (details supplied) will be examined; if the HSE and St. Vincent's hospital will be instructed to engage with the person to answer the questions she has posed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37021/17]

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

HSE Expenditure

832. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent by the HSE on postage and postal services; the forms of communication used by the executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37025/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have referred your question to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

833. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons from County Kerry on the ophthalmic waiting list for cataract assessment or operations at South Infirmity Victoria University Hospital who have been waiting longer than 18 months; the number who can avail of the national treatment purchase fund; the amount of funding that has been made available at the hospital for the NTPF for cataract patients waiting longer than 18 months in 2017; the number of persons from County Kerry who have access to this fund; the amount of additional funding that will be released in 2017 for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37032/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

834. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the waiting list for a gastrointestinal endoscopy at Naas General Hospital has risen from 1,380 persons on 28 February 2017 to 1,655 persons on 31 May 2017; his views on the

fact that this represents 8.5% of persons nationally awaiting a gastrointestinal endoscopy; the steps he will take to reduce the waiting times for gastrointestinal endoscopy at Naas General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37034/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

835. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting speech and language assessment in County Kerry; the number waiting over four months, eight months and 12 months respectively for assessment in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37041/17]

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

Autism Support Services

836. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting autism spectrum disorder, ASD, assessment and intervention in County Kerry; the length of time these children are on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37042/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Equipment

837. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when a second MRI scanner will be provided at University Hospital Galway; the reason for the delay in providing the scanner (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37044/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

838. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of test results for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37046/17]

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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

839. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of minors waiting for initial orthodontic assessment in County Kerry; the number who are further referred for orthodontic treatment in County Kerry; the average waiting time for both initial orthodontic assessment and orthodontic treatment; his plans to reduce this waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37047/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

840. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if waiting times for cataract operations have increased from 2016 to 2017; if so, the reason; the average waiting times for cataract operations at the South Infirmaries Victoria University Hospital; if a breakdown of patients from counties Kerry and Cork will be provided to ascertain whether there is a discrepancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37048/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Data

841. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of referrals to CAMHS received for 2014, 2015 and 2016 in each community health organisation, CHO; the number of such referrals accepted; whether those referrals not accepted were referred to other services; if so, the details of same in each CHO; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37050/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

842. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment can be expe-

dated for a person (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the person is in the process of seeking medical attention in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37052/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy may wish to note that the Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursements 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. Public patients may access the healthcare they require in either the public or private healthcare system of another Member State under the Cross-Border Directive (CBD). Access to healthcare abroad is based on patients following public patient pathways, i.e. they must demonstrate they have followed the equivalent public patient pathways that a patient would follow if accessing public healthcare in Ireland. It is important to note that reimbursement is confined to the costs of the care itself and that the rates of reimbursement cannot exceed the cost of provision of the care if it were provided in the Irish public health service. Referral for care under the CBD may be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other HSE clinicians. The CBD excludes certain health services, e.g. services of public health, long term care, organ transplantation, etc. All persons on public waiting lists, other than for such exempt health services, are eligible for the Scheme. Full details are available on the HSE website.

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

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

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

Vaccination Programme

843. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 968 of 20 June 2017, if the health technology assessment, HTA, on universal vaccination will be completed before September 2018; if his Department is working towards extending the HPV vaccination to boys in September 2018 or 2019 if the assessment produces a positive recommendation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37054/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I expect that the Health Information and Quality Authority will complete the HTA in accordance with the timeframe given in my reply to the parliamentary question referred to by Deputy Kelleher. Any decision concerning the extension of the HPV vaccination programme will be informed by the results of the HTA. It would be inappropriate for me to speculate about the outcome of the HTA and any consequent decisions.

Primary Care Centres Administration

844. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a company (details supplied) has agreed to a deal to take over a number of primary care centres currently operated by the HSE; the primary care centres, in tabular form; the revenues raised by such deals; if other companies have agreed to similar deals for primary care centres or other health facilities; if so, the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37057/17]

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.

Maternity Services Provision

845. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of anomaly scans for pregnancies in the north east; if a service is available in other parts of the country for anomaly scans; if so, his plans to address this lack of service in the north east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37058/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am advised that foetal anomaly scans are available in all Hospital Groups. Those hospitals/maternity units currently providing anomaly scans accept referrals from other maternity units, if requested. This occurs where the medical team in the referring maternity unit consider that an anomaly scan is clinically indicated.

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 at 20 weeks. 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. 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 your specific query regarding the availability of scans in the North East, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Departmental Staff Data

846. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37073/17]

847. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the number of men and women respectively in his Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37084/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 846 and 847 together.

At end June 2017, there were 262 females and 170 males in my Department. Details in respect of the grades the Deputy requested are supplied below:

GRADE	Number of Males	Number of Females
Secretary General	1	-
Deputy Secretary	3	-
Assistant Secretary	2	4
Principal Officer	19	31
Assistant Principal Officer	42	66

Hospital Appointments Status

848. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (detailed supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37092/17]

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

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

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

HSE Staff Training

849. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the training and qualifications required by HSE home helps; the training and qualifications required by employees of private home care provider companies that are employed by the HSE and those hired directly by the family; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37093/17]

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

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

850. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if persons with Lyme disease are eligible under the Cross Border Directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37095/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 co-ordination 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.

The HSE have confirmed that a person may avail of treatment for Lyme disease under the Cross Border Directive.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

851. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting approval for home care supports; the approximate delay in processing an application; the maximum hours that can be allocated to a person; the percentage deducted from a persons home under the fair deal system; and his plans to allow care packages be transferred from a nursing home setting to the family home. [37097/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly with regard to *'the number of persons awaiting approval for home care supports; the approximate delay in processing an application; the maximum hours that can be allocated to a person'*.

In the context of home care it is important to be clear that persons in receipt of home care do not contribute to the cost of their package, so there is no percentage deducted from assets including their home.

The Nursing Homes Support Scheme, commonly referred to as *A Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. In this Scheme, participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. A care needs assessment is carried out to determine if a person requires long term care, followed by a financial assessment to determine how much a person will contribute to their cost of care.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. In the case of a couple, the applicant's means are assessed as 50% of the couple's combined income and assets. The first €36,000 of an individual's assets, or €72,000 in the case of a couple, is not counted at all in the financial assessment. Importantly, the capital value of an individual's principal private residence is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care.

Again it is important to emphasise that Fair Deal is a financial support scheme designed to support those in need of nursing home care only.

There have been calls to extend the Nursing Homes Support Scheme to cover home care services, however, the Government is committed to establishing a new separate statutory home care scheme along with a system of regulation for home care services.

An important step in this process is a public consultation on home care services which I, along with Minister Harris launched on 6 July. The purpose of this consultation is to allow all

those who have views on this topic to have their say, including home care users, their families, and healthcare workers. It will also allow us to find out what people think about current home care services as well as the public's views on what the future scheme should look like. The consultation paper is available online at <http://health.gov.ie/consultations> and I would encourage all those with an interest in home care services to make a submission to the consultation before the closing date of 2 October 2017.

A report of the findings of this consultation process will be published and the findings will be used by the Department in the development of the new home care scheme.

Primary Care Services Provision

852. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if a clinic (details supplied) will be sited at the planned Thurles primary care centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37098/17]

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

Suicide Prevention

853. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the role he envisages voluntary organisations playing in the implementation of the recommendations as outlined in the national strategy to reduce suicide 2015-2020, Connecting for Life. [37100/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

HSE Staff Recruitment

854. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when the eye doctor will be replaced in Portlaoise hospital in view of the fact the services are not available since November 2016. [37102/17]

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

Motorised Transport Grant

855. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of plans for the new transport support scheme which is due to replace the motorised transport grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37103/17]

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.

National Maternity Strategy

856. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health his plans for facilitating home births and for ensuring that professional midwives that support women to have home births are facilitated in doing so. [37106/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy - Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026, recognises pregnancy and birth as a normal physiological process. It aims to ensure that appropriate care pathways are in place in order that mothers, babies and families get the right care, at the right time, by the right team and in the right place. Similarly, it recognises that, while all pregnant women need a certain level of support, some will require more specialised care. Accordingly, it proposes an integrated model of care that encompasses all the necessary safety nets in line with patient safety principles. The model consists of three care pathways - Supported, Assisted and Specialised. The Strategy envisages that home births will form part of the Supported Care pathway.

Ambulance Service Staff

857. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being made to recruit ambulance personnel from overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37107/17]

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

858. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons applying from abroad, trained here, for paramedic positions in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the number of successful applicants in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[37109/17]

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

Hospital Equipment

859. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when access to an insulin pump will be provided in the paediatrics diabetic unit in the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37110/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

860. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to include Crohn's disease under the terms of the long-term illness scheme [37111/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Hospital Services

861. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade Monaghan hospital and reintroduce its accident and emergency department; his views on the concerns of the public due to the lack of this service and delays in ambulance response times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37116/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A key part of the Government's plan for our healthcare system is the most significant reform of our hospital service since the foundation of the State - the establishment of hospital groups operating as single cohesive units with their own governance and management. Hospital Groups enable a better configuration of hospital services with benefits relating to safety, quality, access, cost and sustainable medical staffing and every hospital in the group, large and small, statutory and voluntary, will play a vital role within the Group. Hospitals working together in a Group will be able to support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care, and ensuring that those who require emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals.

The Smaller Hospitals Framework focuses in particular on the future role of smaller hospitals and outlines the wide range of services that can be provided within these smaller hospitals. It also outlines the potential to expand the services delivered in smaller hospitals.

As a Model 2 hospital, Monaghan does not have a 24/7 Emergency Department or critical care unit. However, in line with the Framework, Monaghan Hospital has a Minor Injuries Unit located on site.

I am committed to securing and further developing the role of our smaller hospitals with the expansion of services delivered in these hospitals, especially in services such as day surgery; ambulatory care; medical services and diagnostics.

The Programme for Partnership Government commits to a review of Medical Assessment Units, Urgent Care Centres and Minor Injuries Units, including the Unit at Monaghan Hospital. Work on this review is progressing in 2017.

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been undertaking a significant and ongoing reform programme, to reconfigure the management and delivery of pre-hospital care services. This programme will ensure a clinically driven, nationally co-ordinated system, supported by improved technology. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to additional annual investment in terms of ambulance personnel and vehicles. In that regard an additional €3.6m has been made available to the NAS in 2017, which includes €1m to fund new developments.

Hospital Services

862. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the services available at Monaghan hospital; his plans to extend the opening hours of the minor injuries unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37117/17]

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

Hospital Services

863. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the introduction of the 20 week anomaly scan at Cavan general hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37118/17]

982. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the introduction of the 20 week anomaly scan at Cavan general hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37488/17]

1111. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status regarding the introduction of a procedure a hospital (details supplied); if staff are in place to carry out this procedure; the timeframe for its introduction at this facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37864/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 863, 982 and 1111 together.

I am advised that foetal anomaly scans are available in all Hospital Groups. Those hospitals/maternity units currently providing anomaly scans accept referrals from other maternity units, if requested. This occurs where the medical team in the referring maternity unit consider that an anomaly scan is clinically indicated.

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 and 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 at 20 weeks. 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. 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 your specific queries regarding Cavan General Hospital, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Services

864. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason the fracture clinic slots at Drogheda were reduced for persons being referred from Cavan general hospital (details supplied); if he will increase the time being provided to persons from counties Cavan and Monaghan attending Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37119/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

865. **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. [37120/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy

866. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Waterford on a waiting list for occupational therapy; the number of children in County Waterford awaiting occupational therapy services for up to 12 months, 24 months and 36 months and over, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37127/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

867. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that presented for mental health services to HSE facilities in County Waterford in each of the years 2007 to 2016, and to date in 2017; the number of persons that presented for mental health services to HSE facilities with a residential address in County Waterford in each of the years from 2007 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37128/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Lists Action Plans

868. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the waiting list action plans for 2017 in the areas of inpatient and day case, scoliosis and outpatient services have been funded by the National Treatment Purchase Fund or if they are a HSE initiative only. [37129/17]

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

Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018. Of this 2017 allocation, €15 million has been set aside for the treatment of those patients waiting longest for inpatient and daycase procedures.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding.

The Scoliosis and Outpatient Action Plan's are being delivered through the HSE 2017 budget allocation.

Health Services Staff Data

869. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the names of all persons who have held a paid position at the grade of national director level at any time, including those who have departed, with the public health services since the beginning of 2011, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37130/17]

870. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed at the grade of national director by the public health services at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37131/17]

871. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons paid at national director level by the health services at present including the voluntary hospitals and all publicly funded health providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37132/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 869 to 871, inclusive, together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on these matters.

Mental Health Services Provision

872. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) with regard to psychology appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37133/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Public Relations Contracts Data

873. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on external communications and public relations by publicly funded hospitals and individual community health care organisations in 2016, in tabular form. [37134/17]

874. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount spent on external communications and public relations by publicly funded hospitals and individual community health care organisations in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37135/17]

875. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid by each individual hospital, each hospital group and each CHO to named public relations and communications companies in 2016. [37136/17]

876. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the amount paid by each individual hospital, each hospital group and each CHO to named public relations and communications companies in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37137/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 873 to 876, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy's questions relate to expenditure by the Health Service Executive I have referred them to the HSE for direct reply.

Medicinal Products

877. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the usage of bi-similars as against biologics in publicly funded hospitals; his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37138/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is currently developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy to promote the rational use of biosimilar medicines and to create a sustainable environment for biological medicines in Ireland. The policy will aim to increase biosimilar use in Ireland, by creating a robust framework in which biologicals and biosimilars can be safely, cost-effectively and confidently used in the health service.

My Department has initiated this consultation process to ensure that a wide range of views are considered in developing this policy framework. The consultation paper is available online at <http://health.gov.ie/consultations> and the closing date for submissions is the 22 September 2017.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

878. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be given an urgent appointment in Crumlin children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37141/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

879. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the timeline for the replacement of the ENT surgeon at Tallaght hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37142/17]

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

Disability Services Provision

880. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which appropriate treatment and back-up can be offered to a person (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. [37143/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will

empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

881. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for nursing support by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37147/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

882. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of places available in each county under the community funded scheme (details supplied); and the waiting lists in each area to date in 2017 by county, in tabular form. [37148/17]

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

Health Services Provision

883. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for a form of therapy (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37149/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Primary Care Centres Provision

884. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding in place for a primary care centre (details supplied) which will now be built at an alternative site to

that announced a number of years ago; and if this funding is sufficient to complete the project. [37155/17]

886. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a primary care centre first announced in 2013 for Monaghan town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37157/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 884 and 886 together.

The HSE has advised that the design team is currently completing the Detailed Design stage.

Future investment in healthcare infrastructure, including this project, must be considered within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place. As there will always be more projects than can be funded by the Exchequer, capital funding is not ring-fenced by project in order to ensure that the HSE has flexibility within its capital allocation in the event that one or more of the hundreds of construction projects underway at any time do not progress as scheduled. This enables the HSE to leverage its capital allocation efficiently, so that it delivers the maximum number of priority projects for the funding available.

Home Help Service Eligibility

885. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) was refused home help; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37156/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 886 answered with Question No. 884.

Nursing Staff Data

887. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed by hospital over the past 12 months; the areas in which they were employed in each hospital, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37158/17]

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

Nursing Staff

888. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding nurses who, due to ill health, seek to move from their current place of work to a location closer to their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37160/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

889. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the ear, nose and throat waiting lists for the RCSI hospital group; and the number of children and adults in the Cavan-Monaghan LHO area waiting one to six months, seven to 12 months, 13 to 24 months, 25 to 48 months and over 48 months. [37161/17]

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

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

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, almost 22,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 5,295 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its Day Case Initiative, 2,065 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 954 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 2,496 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 558 offers of treatment have been accepted and 104 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, almost 79,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

890. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the HSE's assessment of phase III data relevant to access to Translarna for the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37162/17]

891. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason for denying HSE funding for the drug Translarna; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37163/17]

978. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he has had discussions with the HSE regarding the decision to withdraw funding for Duchenne muscular dystrophy medication Translarna; if he has satisfied himself that every effort has been made to provide adequate alternative access to this medication to the small numbers of persons that are currently reliant on this medication; if he will detail the alternatives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37473/17]

995. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fund Translarna, a medicine for persons with Duchenne muscular dystrophy; his further plans to assist persons with this rare disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37523/17]

1075. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to making the Translarna drug available for persons who suffer from Duchenne muscular dystrophy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37775/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 890, 891, 978, 995 and 1075 together.

The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE informed my Department of its decision not to reimburse Ataluren (Translarna) in July 2017. The HSE informed the manufacturer of this decision, in keeping with the requirements of the 2013 Act. The manufacturer has appealed the HSE's decision to the High Court under Section 27 of the 2013 Act.

As proceedings have now issued against the HSE, this is now subject to the Courts process.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a matter currently before the Courts.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

892. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter with regard to the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37166/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I understand that the issue of proposed changes arose because the HSE intended to standardise the way in which wigs and hairpieces and post-mastectomy products are provided and to extend the services to a broader cohort of patients. Guidelines were prepared to help establish equal and consistent access but the proposed changes resulted in concerns for patients who are already receiving such supports. When I became aware of the proposed changes I asked the HSE to come back with an enhanced plan that extends the service to a broader group of patients but does not adversely affect patients who are already coping with serious illness. The HSE has confirmed that it has withdrawn the guidelines in order to engage further with the various stakeholders involved, including patients and suppliers. This process is expected to take several months to conduct and no changes to existing services are to be introduced in the meantime. I have asked the HSE to contact you directly regarding the individual concerned.

Electronic Cigarettes

893. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has undertaken clinical research into vaping, further to the publication of the Health Information and Quality Authority's health technology assessment of smoking cessation interventions, which highlighted the need for further research; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37167/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): My Depart-

ment, in pursuing the recommendations of Tobacco Free Ireland requested the Health Information and Quality Authority to carry out a health technology assessment of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical smoking cessation products and services.

The results of the assessment will inform the development of national clinical guidelines which are currently being developed by the Health Service Executive in conjunction with the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee.

My Department will continue to monitor the emerging research on these products, so as to inform decisions around any future additional regulation in this area.

Primary Care Reimbursement Service Payments

894. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a refund for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37170/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

895. **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. [37172/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

896. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a means exists whereby a person (details supplied) can obtain a therapy guide dog; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37177/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department of Health does not commission the provision or training of assistance/service dogs for children or adults with disabilities. The Health Service Executive's (HSE's) focus is on the protection of core activities such as residential, respite, day and core-therapy provision. Provi-

sion of assistance/service dogs to people with a disability is not considered a core health service and is not prioritised for funding by the HSE.

However, I would suggest that the Deputy might consider contacting the organisation Irish Dogs for the Disabled at www.dogsfordisabled.ie, which may be able to provide him with additional information on the matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

897. **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. [37176/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

898. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37187/17]

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.

Newborn Screening Cards

899. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 769 and 770 of 26 July 2017, the position regarding the policy paper on newborn screening cards; the timeframe for the completion and publication of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37191/17]

900. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 769 and 770 of 26 July 2017, if the policy paper on newborn screening cards will

only address the prospective future retention, storage and potential secondary uses of the cards; the policy options being prepared for those cards that are already held; the retrospective options that exist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37192/17]

1161. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the policy paper being prepared by his Department regarding options to seal the breach of the data protection legislation regarding Guthrie cards retained without consent and to provide for the future retention, storage and potential secondary uses of the cards; the timeframe for the publication of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38126/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 899, 900 and 1161 together.

As I outlined in my previous response to Questions Nos. 769 and 770 of 26 July 2017, following a complaint made to the Data Protection Commissioner in 2009 the State remains in breach of both European Union and national data protection legislation in relation to the retention of newborn screening cards without consent. A policy was developed to address the legal and ethical requirement of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme (the Programme) and implemented in July 2011. This policy provides for parental consent for the baby to be screened and the card retained for a specific period of time (10 years). During this time, the card can only be used to check the baby's results and for other tests the baby may require and for quality assurance.

The Department of Health hosted a Forum in October 2016 to provide participants from a broad range of areas with the opportunity to engage in dialogue with international experts regarding the retention and possible secondary uses, including research using cards from the archive and in the future. The themes in the Forum report together with international evidence are being considered by officials in my Department to inform policy options regarding the cards retained without consent and to provide prospectively for the future retention, storage and potential secondary uses of the cards. Work on this policy paper is well advanced and will be considered in the coming months.

Health Reports

901. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 772 to 774, inclusive, of 26 July 2017, when the report on the validation of the FDI sugar and fat reduction work will be completed and published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37193/17]

1160. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a report on validation of the sugar and fat reduction will be published (details supplied); the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38125/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 901 and 1160 together.

I propose to take these questions together as they all relate to the FDI/Creme Global Reformulation Project Report.

The food industry body Food Drink Ireland (FDI) meets with FSAI periodically at the industry's request to seek their input into the industry's reformulation work. The FSAI have been validating food industry salt reduction work for many years by sampling foods from the market and having them analysed in the HSE Public Analysts Laboratory in Galway. These data are

published annually and are available on the FSAI web site.

The FSAI has only recently started to look at validation of the FDI sugar and fat reduction work and have, in the first instance, been developing baseline data on yogurts and breakfast cereals based on food labelled data.

A report on this labelling work is expected to be published before the end of the year.

Health Strategies

902. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of Ireland's food improvement plan as required by the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37194/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Ireland is actively involved in the EU Food Reformulation Project and is represented by my Department on the EU High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity. The EU High Level Group is agreeing EU targets for reformulation of foods and beverages with Member States across Europe.

In line with the relevant actions in the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025, a Food Reformulation Working Group is being established and membership is being determined by my Department. Draft terms of reference are being prepared for this technical Group and it is envisaged that it will be convened in the near future.

Health Strategies

903. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when his Department's new voluntary code of practice for food marketing, promotion and sponsorship will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37195/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): 'A Healthy Weight for Ireland', the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP), was launched last September under the Healthy Ireland agenda. The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy.

I wish to emphasise that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this.

The OPAP prescribes 'Ten Steps Forward' and under each step there are a number of actions, some of which have been identified for early implementation.

Step 3 is to *Secure appropriate support from the commercial sector to play its part in obesity prevention*. Under this step, a Code of Practice for food and drink promotion, marketing, product placement and sponsorship has been developed by a working group and it will be published shortly.

Health Care Policy

904. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendation 5.16 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 to 2019; the status of the service needs

review for GUCH patients; the status of the service development plan; the way in which it is progressing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37196/17]

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

Health Care Policy

905. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 4.2 and 4.3 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37197/17]

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

Health Care Policy

906. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.17 and 5.18, respectively, of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37198/17]

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

Health Care Policy

907. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3, respectively, of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37199/17]

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

Health Care Policy

908. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations Nos. 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37200/17]

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

Health Care Policy

909. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of recommendations Nos. 7.2, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.6 of the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37201/17]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

910. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason the medication OcuVite Lutein Forte has been withdrawn from being made available to persons under the medical card scheme; the alternative medication that has been considered to be included in absence of the medicine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37204/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

911. **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. [37205/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff

912. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide for extra paediatric consultant ENT surgeons across Temple Street and Crumlin children's hospitals, in view of the very long waiting lists for ENT surgeries at both hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37206/17]

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

Hospital Services

913. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an assessment for a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37208/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

914. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the assessment to be held by the Health Service Executive on the pricing and reimbursement under the community drugs scheme of the FreeStyle Libre medical device, which is used by diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37209/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

915. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when the medication Hepa-Merz Granulat 3000 (details supplied) will be made available under the general medical scheme so that persons can have the cost of this included in the €144 they pay per month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37214/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

916. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if persons suffering from a medical condition which requires Hepa-Merz Granulat 3000 (details supplied) will be considered for inclusion on the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37215/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Departmental Expenditure

917. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37226/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are two Bank of Ireland corporate credit cards for official business purposes currently in use in my Department. The cards are held by my Private Secretary and a nominated officer in my Department's Finance Unit. Until 2017 these cards operated on a no fees basis. Therefore, the costs incurred on these cards from 2012 to 2016 are the standard €120 per year annual card charge and €30 per year Stamp Duty charge.

For current account services for the period in question, a no fees agreement was in operation with Bank of Ireland.

Health Services Provision

918. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a detailed list of the services available in Cork city and county for children who have been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome; the details of supports available to their parents and siblings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37235/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Funding

919. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the pilot community ophthalmic services medical treatment scheme announced in 2008 and currently offered in seven locations is funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37236/17]

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

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

920. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a nursing registration application of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [37259/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I wish to thank the Deputy for the matter raised.

Given that this is an operational matter, it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the NMBI. I have referred the Deputy's question to the NMBI for attention and direct reply within 10 working days.

Health Services Funding

921. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to review its decision to halt funding to the World Health Organization-approved baby friendly health initiative programme here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37268/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive are totally committed to increasing breast feeding rates in Ireland.

National health policy, including the Healthy Ireland Framework, the National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026, the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025 and the recently published National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 all emphasise the importance of supporting mothers who breastfeed as well as taking action to increase breastfeeding rates in Ireland.

The recent National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 re-affirmed the commitment to advance public support of breastfeeding, and includes an action to extend provision for breastfeeding breaks under employment legislation (currently available to mothers of children under 6 months).

Regarding the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) issue, in 2016 the HSE commissioned a research team at TCD to undertake a review of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. One of the key findings of the Review was that there was no difference in breastfeeding rates in hospitals that had achieved the Baby Friendly designation, and those that hadn't achieved designation. In fact, while the Initiative has been in place for 20 years, only 9 of the 19 maternity hospitals have achieved the Baby Friendly designation. This Review highlighted the need for a revised model of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.

Following completion of the Review, the HSE initiated engagement with The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative and other stakeholders on developing a revised model. While the HSE has made the decision to pause the existing initiative and it is not being funded for 2017.

The HSE are currently progressing the development of a revised model, working with the National Women and Infants Programme, the HSE Health and Wellbeing Division, the HSE Lead Midwife and other key stakeholders. The revised model will continue to support the implementation of the WHO/UNICEF 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, which is the basis of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. The revised model is expected by the end of the year and will be rolled out in 2018.

A wide range of other actions are underway in implementing the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020. These include:

- Improved Governance and health service structures;
- Breastfeeding training and skills development;

- Health service policies and practices; and
- Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum;
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.

Details of specific actions can be seen in the HSE National Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2020 on the HSE website [breastfeeding.ie](https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf) and here is the link <https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf>.

National Maternity Strategy

922. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the HSE to ring-fence funding for the implementation of the national maternity strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37269/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A National Women & Infants Health Programme has been established to lead the management, organisation and delivery of maternity, gynaecological and neonatal services by bringing together work that is currently undertaken across a number of HSE divisions. The National Maternity Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis and this work will be led by the Programme.

The Strategy confirms that all development funding for maternity services will be ring-fenced and allocated through the Programme. The Programme, with its wide remit and dedicated expertise, will facilitate greater oversight and support for service providers and will ensure the appropriate allocation and targeting of new resources.

€3 million development funding provided for maternity services in 2016 was allocated in line with the Strategy, and included funding for additional staff, including 100 midwives, the development of specialist bereavement teams and for the implementation of the Maternal and Newborn Clinical Management System. Increased funding of €6.8m being provided for maternity services in 2017 is facilitating the continued implementation of the Strategy.

Hospital Appointments Status

923. **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. [37270/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

924. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37287/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

925. **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. [37293/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Card Eligibility

926. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) was ineligible for an emergency medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37299/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

927. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive an appointment for cataract surgery at the Mater hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37300/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

928. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied). [37310/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

929. **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. [37311/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to

you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

930. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when the appropriate corrective surgery can be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37312/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

931. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make a medical device (details supplied) available under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37313/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

932. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37314/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

933. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the progress made in securing a residential placement for a person in (details supplied) in County Cork that is profoundly disabled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37315/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Data

934. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the costs of the top ten drugs used by the psychiatric services operated by the HSE, the name of the drugs, the cost, the numbers dispensed in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37318/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

935. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he has carried out an assessment of the number of special needs persons who will require supports from 18 to 25 years of age in County Meath in the context of their full-time care, respite, group education, independent living accommodation services and so on; his plans to provide funding in this area for the future; the services available now; his plans to support and develop the services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37331/17]

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 question relating to group education is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

However, as the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

936. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37338/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

937. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will re-engage with a person (details supplied) regarding the sale of the family home. [37346/17]

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

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

938. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have accessed care services in other jurisdictions and numbers availing of treatment under the cross-Border health care directive scheme since its inception, by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37360/17]

939. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding that has been reimbursed to patients through the cross-Border health care directive to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37361/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 938 and 939 together.

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

As the HSE has responsibility for the administration of the Cross Border Directive, I have asked the HSE to examine the issues raised and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Services for People with Disabilities

940. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a review can take place as to whether financial assistance can be provided towards the cost of a wheelchair in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37362/17]

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

Medical Card Administration

941. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 417 of 27 June 2017, if the information requested in the question can be obtained from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; if he will confirm that his Department has no involvement in monitoring the deaths of medical card holders against the names on general practitioner lists and not responsible for auditing this situation. [37380/17]

942. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 418 of 27 June 2017, if he will introduce a sanctions system in circumstances in which it is clear that the overpayments are not due to a normal time lag between date of death and cessation of fees. [37382/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 941 and 942 together.

I understand that my colleague Regina Doherty T.D., the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, will address the matter you raised concerning the role of community welfare officers.

The HSE Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) is responsible for providing reimbursement services to primary care contractors for the provision of health services to members of the public in their own community, including GPs contracted to provide services to eligible persons under the General Medical Services Scheme. As previously outlined to the Deputy, a number of channels exist through which the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) receives notice of the death of a medical card or GP visit card holder. These include:

- Notification through the Death Event Publication Service (DEPS) via a monthly file;
- Notification through the local Community Health Offices;
- Notification through the National Medical Card Unit contact centre, where clients' families provide information;
- Notification via letters/returned cards from clients' families;
- Notification from Nursing Homes;
- Notification from GPs.

Payments to GPs in respect of services provided to persons under the GMS scheme are terminated once the notification of a person's death is recorded. In circumstances where amounts have been paid to GPs for periods after the last day of the month in which a person has died, the PCRS makes appropriate adjustments to the monthly capitation payment made to GPs to balance any such overpayments.

There are no plans to introduce a sanctions system for GPs in relation to overpayments related to deceased eligible patients. It is important to stress that any such overpayment made to a GP in relation to a deceased medical card holder or GP visit card holder is recouped when the death of the eligible person is recorded by PCRS via the aforementioned process.

Should the Deputy be aware of a specific instance where an overpayment has occurred in relation to a deceased patient which she believes should be investigated, she would be welcome to submit such information to my Department or directly to the PCRS.

Respite Care Services Provision

943. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider a proposal or seek available respite services for persons from County Louth in a service (details supplied) until such time that respite services are adequate in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37383/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Properties

944. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the progression of refurbishment of the HSE property on Drogheda Street, Monasterevin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37387/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Drug Treatment Programmes

945. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the Health Service Executive has plans to establish a drug addiction clinic and treatment centre on a site (details supplied). [37389/17]

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.

Organ Donation

946. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the proposals in place to introduce an opt-out model of organ donation scheme here similar to the schemes in many European countries. [37390/17]

1056. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if a decision has been made on the proposal to introduce a soft opt-out model of organ donation here; if not, the timeframe for a decision regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37701/17]

1087. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will respond to renewed calls for a soft opt-out system of organ donation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37824/17]

1177. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress he is making regarding the introduction of a soft opt-out organ donation system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38187/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 946, 1056, 1087 and 1177 together.

In July 2017 the Government approved the preparation of a General Scheme and Heads of a Human Tissue Bill. The General Scheme will include provisions for an opt-out system of consent for organ donation. Under this system, consent will be deemed unless the person has, while alive, registered his/her wish not to become an organ donor after death. However, the next-of-kin will always be consulted prior to removing any organ.

One of the aims of the legislation is to make organ donation the norm in Ireland when people pass away in circumstances in which donation is a possibility. The introduction of an opt-out system of consent for organ donation will be accompanied by a publicity campaign aimed at raising awareness of organ donation and encouraging discussion among families of the intentions of family members in relation to organ donation.

A public consultation on the proposed Human Tissue Bill commenced on 28 August. The consultation questionnaire is available online at <http://health.gov.ie/consultations> and the closing date for submissions is 9 October 2017.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

947. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing positions in the Saolta group that will be offered to upcoming graduates of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37391/17]

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

Nursing Staff Recruitment

948. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if all nursing graduates of 2017 will be offered permanent contracts when they graduate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37392/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under an agreement reached with the INMO and SIPTU Nursing earlier this year, management committed to increasing the nursing and

midwifery workforce in 2017 to deliver 1,224 additional permanent posts. As part of the Agreement the HSE have committed to offering all graduating nurses full time contracts. I recognise the importance of recruiting and retaining our graduate nurses and on the 27 April I issued a written direction under Section 10 of the Health Act 2004, to the Health Service Executive, in order to emphasise the importance of full implementation of this Agreement.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the current position in relation to offering permanent contracts to all nursing graduates.

Home Help Service Provision

949. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure extra home help hours are provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37394/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Staff Data

950. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacant positions for doctors in all hospitals in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37395/17]

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

Hospital Staff Data

951. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies in nursing positions in all hospitals in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37396/17]

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

Hospital Staff Data

952. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies in Health Service Executive management positions in all hospitals in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37397/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

953. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an urgent operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37401/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Administration

954. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37402/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Administration

955. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37417/17]

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

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

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

respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

956. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37418/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

957. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); if he will expedite same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37419/17]

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

EU Regulations

958. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Health if inspections are now taking place with respect to compliance of S.I. 271 of 2016 in view of the fact that the sell-through period deadline for vaping products and e-liquids as set out in same expired on 20 May 2017; if his Department and the Health Service Executive, HSE, have provided training to the environmental health officers that carry out inspections; if the HSE plans to produce an annual compliance report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37421/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Compliance with SI 271 of 2016 European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and related products) Regulations 2016 is a matter for the HSE as the Enforcement Authority for the Regulations. I have forwarded your question to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Data

959. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons em-

ployed as home help by the Health Service Executive, HSE, in counties Kildare, Laois and Offaly at the end of each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37422/17]

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

Home Help Service Data

960. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed as home help through agencies by the Health Service Executive, HSE, in counties Kildare, Laois and Offaly at the end of each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37423/17]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

961. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an urgent assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37424/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Provision

962. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of unfulfilled community nursing, home help and home care hours (details supplied) at the last count, by county or region, in tabular form [37439/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Obesity Strategy

963. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding 1.1 to 1.11 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37442/17]

964. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 2.1 to 2.4 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37443/17]

965. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 3.1 to 3.5 in A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37444/17]

966. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendation 4.1 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37445/17]

967. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 5.1 to 5.5 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37446/17]

968. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 6.1 to 6.13 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37447/17]

969. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 7.1 to 7.4 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37448/17]

970. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 8.1 to 8.3 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37449/17]

971. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 9.1 to 9.3 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37450/17]

972. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding recommendations 10.1 to 10.11 of A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37451/17]

973. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the ten steps forward in A Healthy Weight for Ireland obesity policy and action plan 2016 to 2025; the number of priority actions planned to commence in the first year that have commenced; the priority actions which have not commenced in the first year; the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37452/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 963 to 973, inclusive, together.

I am pleased to be able to report to the Deputy on progress with the early implementation of 'A Healthy Weight for Ireland', the Obesity Policy and Action Plan (OPAP). As the Deputy is aware, this Policy was launched last September under the Healthy Ireland agenda. The OPAP covers a ten year period up to 2025 and aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy. I wish to emphasise that every sector of our society has a role in reducing the burden of obesity and the OPAP clearly acknowledges this. The OPAP prescribes 'Ten Steps Forward' and under each step there are a number of actions, some of which have been identified for early implementation. The current position with these steps and early priority actions is as follows:

1. *Embed multi-sectoral actions on obesity prevention with the support of government departments and public sector agencies:* Plans by my Department to establish an Implementation Oversight Group are well advanced and the first meeting of this cross-sectoral group is expected to take place in the coming weeks. The Minister for Finance has also announced that he will introduce a tax on sugar sweetened drinks starting in 2018;

2. *Regulate for a healthier environment:* the development of legislation for calorie posting to support people to make healthy choices is underway by my Department. In addition, actions in this area are being progressed through engagement with other Government Departments to support the work of stakeholders involved in planning and developing the built environment.

3. *Secure appropriate support from the commercial sector to play its part in obesity prevention:* A number of working groups will be established within the overall national oversight structure referred to above - including one on food reformulation. A Code of Practice for food and drink promotion, marketing, product placement and sponsorship has been developed by a working group and will be published shortly.

4. *Implement a strategic and sustained communications strategy that empowers individuals, communities and service providers to become obesity aware and equipped to change, with a particular focus on families with children in the early years:* A new child obesity campaign is being developed with *safe* food and the HSE as an important initial action in this area, and this campaign is expected to be launched before the end of this year.

5. *The Department of Health, through Healthy Ireland, will provide leadership, engage and co-ordinate multi-sectoral action and implement best practice in the governance of the Obesity Policy and Action Plan:* As referred to at step 1 above, the establishment of an Implementation Oversight Group is well advanced. New Healthy Eating Guidelines, Food Pyramid and supporting resources have already been published, disseminated and communicated in 2017, including dissemination of the new Guidelines earlier this month to all primary and post-primary schools. Work has also commenced on developing Healthy Eating Guidelines for the 1-5 year old age group. New Nutrition Standards for schools, with an initial focus on school meal programmes funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, have also been developed and will be published shortly.

6. *Mobilise the health services to better prevent and address overweight and obesity through effective community-based health promotion programmes, training and skills development and through enhanced systems for detection and referrals of overweight and obese patients at primary care level:* A Healthy Eating, Active Living Programme has been established as a Policy Priority Programme within the HSE and a three-year plan for the programme is currently being finalised; the GP contract for the provision of care free to children under 6 years already provides that the Medical Practitioner shall take an active approach toward promoting health and preventing disease through the provision of Periodic Assessments to Child Patients. Assessments involve the recording of age, gender, weight and height, and plotting on a centile chart at ages two and five, and taking appropriate follow-up action, including where appropriate, provision of health promotion advice, brief intervention and support, or referral to specialist services. The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is underway. 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. The HSE is also implementing a Breastfeeding Action Plan and a new Making Every Contact Count brief intervention framework was recently launched by the HSE which aims to capitalise on the opportunities that occur every day within the health service to support people to make healthy lifestyle choices.

7. *Develop a service model for specialist care for children and adults:* I welcome the recent appointment of a National Clinical Lead for Obesity, Professor Donal O'Shea. This appointment will be important in further advancing the implementation of many of the recommendations in the OPAP including the development of a national integrated service model for the health and social care of overweight and obese people and for developing quality assurance guidance for obesity services.

8. *Acknowledge the key role of physical activity in the prevention of overweight and obesity:* 'Get Ireland Active! The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland' (NPAP) is one of the key developments arising from Healthy Ireland, and implementation of that Plan is well underway in collaboration with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and a range of other stakeholders..

9. *Allocate resources according to need, in particular to those population groups most in need of support in the prevention and management of obesity, with particular emphasis on families and children during the first 1,000 days of life:* the implementation of the Healthy Eating and Active Living Plan within the HSE will begin to address this action area, with a particular focus on supporting parents and families.

10. *Develop a multi-annual research programme that is closely allied to policy actions, invest in surveillance and evaluate progress on an annual basis;* The establishment of the national oversight structure referred to earlier will foster developments under this step of the OPAP.

Health Services

974. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a transfer list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37459/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

975. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37461/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products

976. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if there has been a change in policy for the distribution of medication to persons who receive their monthly prescriptions in blister packs; and the reason monthly prescription holders can only receive blister packs that contain seven days' medication rather than the full months' supply in one visit. [37468/17]

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

977. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter regarding a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37470/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 978 answered with Question No. 890.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

979. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when the freestyle flash glucose monitoring system will be made available to persons here through the medical card scheme or the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37476/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 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.

Community Care

980. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the Maynooth community care unit, County Kildare; and the timeframe for the unit to receive its €1 million investment. [37485/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Many public units are housed in buildings that are less than ideal in the modern context, but notwithstanding this, the care delivered to residents is generally of a very high standard. It is important therefore that we upgrade our public bed stock and this is the aim of the 5 year Capital Investment Programme for Community Nursing Units which was announced last year. This provides the framework to allow for an enhanced programme to replace, upgrade and refurbish these care facilities, as appropriate. Significant work was undertaken to determine the most optimum scheduling of projects within the phased provision of funding to achieve compliance with National Standards. Maynooth Community Care Unit is not included under this programme.

I understand that the potential to refurbish Maynooth is being considered by the HSE at present and I further understand that there are no indications that beds will be closed. I have

asked the Health Service Executive to provide further information to the Deputy in respect of the unit in question.

Medicinal Products Availability

981. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the progress made by the HSE following representations by the applicant company to provide a drug (details supplied). [37486/17]

1178. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding persons who have been using Respreeza for many years; if this drug will continue to be available to these persons; the position with regard to persons who also might benefit from using this drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38218/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 981 and 1178 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE has considered the issue of reimbursement of Respreeza for maintenance treatment of emphysema in adults with documented severe alpha1-proteinase inhibitor deficiency.

The HSE has decided not to support reimbursement of the medicine at the price sought by the applicant indicating that it did not consider the evidence for its clinical benefit to be sufficiently strong, in the context of the proposed cost and budget impact. I instructed the HSE to engage with patient groups directly in relation to this decision .

In relation to the access scheme, the operation of such schemes is at the discretion of manufacturers. As Minister for Health, I have no role in the operation of these schemes. There is no provision in Irish legislation for the approval of patient access programmes for specific groups of patients with an unmet medical need.

I have previously said that any attempts by manufacturers to link continued access for patients already being treated with a new medicine with decisions under the statutory reimbursement process is both inappropriate and unethical. Manufacturers should operate such schemes in a compassionate and not a commercially-motivated manner. There should be no link between patient access schemes and reimbursement decisions and manufacturers should be open with patients and clinicians from the outset.

Question No. 982 answered with Question No. 863.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

983. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding liners for prostheses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37497/17]

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

Ambulance Service

984. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the hospitals in the Saolta group are hiring private ambulances for after hours patient transfer call outs rather than using the available national ambulance service ambulances; the reason for this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37502/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Ambulance Service (NAS) currently manages emergency and intermediate care transport services. Responsibility for the provision of non-emergency patient transport service provision transferred from the NAS to individual service providers such as Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations in 2012 to better facilitate local decision making with regard to providing for patients needs.

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 Staff

985. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the reason intermediate care operatives in the national ambulance service are not paid double time for overtime, which other health staff receive, and are not entitled to long-service increments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37503/17]

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

Disability Services Provision

986. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be assessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37508/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

987. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37509/17]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

988. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an ophthalmology appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37510/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

989. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a knee operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37511/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff

990. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of months Talaght Hospital was without an adult spinal consultant in 2017 until the newly appointed position was filled in August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37512/17]

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

Hospital Staff

991. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Tallaght Hospital finished working in adult services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37513/17]

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

Hospital Staff Data

992. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of spinal consultants employed by the HSE in each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37514/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

993. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list to visit a spinal consultant in Tallaght Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37515/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

994. **Deputy Fiona O’Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list to visit a spinal consultant in each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37516/17]

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

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

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, almost 22,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/

Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 5,295 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its Day Case Initiative, 2,065 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 954 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 2,496 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 558 offers of treatment have been accepted and 104 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, almost 79,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Question No. 995 answered with Question No. 890.

Rare Diseases

996. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of cases dealt with by the National Rare Diseases Office in 2015 and in 2016 and to date in 2017; the numbers for each disease; the number and grade of staff at this office; if waiting lists exist in this area; the number of persons on the waiting lists; the length of time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37524/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

997. **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. [37527/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

998. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37533/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

999. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hearing aid for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37534/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1000. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37538/17]

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

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

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

Dental Services

1001. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the status of dentistry services for primary school children (details supplied) in County Carlow; the most recent figures available for dental services carried out in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37541/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been re-

ferred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1002. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37546/17]

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

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

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

Mobility Allowance

1003. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when the Health (Transport Support) Bill 2017 will be progressed; the estimated cost of reinstating the mobility allowance; his plans to assist those with disabilities and their transport needs; the collaboration he is undertaking with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in that regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37554/17]

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. The Deputy might wish to note that 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 at the time the scheme closed, at an annual cost of approximately €10 million.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The Government commitment to this area is evident in the *Programme for a Partnership Government* which 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.

My colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, has responsibility for transport policy for people with a disability. I understand that “Transport Access for All”, the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport’s (DTTAS’s) Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act, 2005, guides policy in relation to public transport services for persons with disabilities. DTTAS has also committed to a number of actions under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

I have been informed that accessibility features are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. New systems, such as the Luas, are fully accessible. In addition, 100% of the Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann city fleets are wheelchair accessible, along with 80% of the Bus Éireann coach fleet. This will increase as the coach fleet is replaced.

With regard to existing infrastructure, there is an ongoing Accessibility Grants Programme, which is managed by the National Transport Authority (NTA) on behalf of DTTAS, to upgrade public transport infrastructure and facilities to improve transport accessibility across the country. Funding of €3 million has been allocated to the NTA in 2017 for this Programme and additional funding for transport investment is being sought in the mid-term review of the Capital Plan. The bulk of the funding under the Programme has been provided for accessibility upgrade works at rail stations and to make bus stops and bus stations accessible to enable wheelchair users to travel on Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann buses.

The NTA receives funding under the programme for the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Grant Scheme. As of June this year, 6% or 1,291 of the taxi fleet is wheelchair accessible, with a target of 10% set for 2020. Funding is also provided via the NTA for the Travel Assistance Scheme, which is run by Dublin Bus. Under the Scheme, an assistant can accompany persons requiring help to use public transport and to plan a journey on Dublin Bus, Luas and the Dart.

Congregated Settings Report

1004. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that were moved out of institutions and congregated settings in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37556/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The HSE’s report “*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion*”, (2011) proposes a new model of support in the community by moving people from institutional settings to the community. The plan is being rolled out at a regional and local level and involves full consultation with stakeholders.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. In May 2016, 2725 people lived in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings. A congregated setting is defined as a residential setting where people live with ten or more

people.

The HSE has established a subgroup, under ‘*Transforming Lives*’, the Programme to implement the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review of Disability Services, which is developing an implementation plan for moving people from institutions. I welcome the fact that the needs of people moving from congregated settings will be fully taken into account during this process as the model of care for individuals will be based on a person centred plan.

At the end of December 2016, less than 2,600 people with a disability were living in congregated settings. The HSE’s 2017 National Service Plan has set a target of 223 to move from institutions in 2017. This will ensure that people are able to move out of congregated settings, and into their own homes in the community. I want to emphasise that the appropriate supports and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on “*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion*”, I have arranged for the Deputy’s questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Congregated Settings Report

1005. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the resources and funding for those persons that remain in congregated settings with high support needs annually in each of the years from 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the amount of that funding was provided to residential care institutions providing care; the details of the public and private institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37557/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The HSE’s report “*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings – A Strategy for Community Inclusion*”, (2011) proposes a new model of support in the community by moving people from institutional settings to the community. The plan is being rolled out at a regional and local level and involves full consultation with stakeholders.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. In May 2016, 2725 people lived in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings. A congregated setting is defined as a residential setting where people live with ten or more people.

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and resources are being put in place to ensure that people are supported as they move out of residential centres.

As the HSE is responsible for leading out on the recommendations on “*Time to Move on from Congregated Settings - A Strategy for Community Inclusion*”, I have arranged for the Deputy’s questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Homeless Persons Supports

1006. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the collaborative efforts being undertaken by his Department and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to address the census 2016 findings information that 27% of homeless persons indicated that they have a disability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37558/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability (NHSPWD) 2011 – 2016 was published in October 2011 and the associated National Implementation Framework was published in July 2012. These documents are joint publications by the Department of the Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Department of Health. Implementation of the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability is being driven by a dedicated Subgroup chaired by the Housing Agency. The Strategy recognises the need for a robust interagency framework to facilitate person centred delivery of housing and relevant supports.

The collaborative structures put in place through the NHSPWD will ensure cross-Departmental and agency support to enable people with disabilities to live independent lives in the community. The Department of Health and the HSE are represented on the NHSPWD Implementation Monitoring Group, and on the Housing Subgroup. Key actions include the National Guidelines for Assessment and Allocation for Housing Provision for People with Disabilities have been developed and rolled out in local authorities. At local level, the HSE is represented in Housing and Disability Steering Groups in each local authority area.

The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to continue to move people with disabilities out of congregated settings, to enable them to live independently and to be included in the community. The objective is to reduce this figure by one-third by 2021 and ultimately, to eliminate all congregated settings. The reconfiguration of residential services is being supported by €100 million in capital funding from the Department of Health over the period 2016-2021, while assistance with transitional costs is being provided by a Service Reform Fund. Supported by this Department and the HSE, the DHPLG is providing ring-fenced funding in 2017 under the Capital Allocation Scheme (CAS), specifically for the provision of housing for people with disabilities who are moving out of congregated settings into community based living arrangements.

The Department of Health and the HSE also participate in the implementation monitoring group for the Housing Strategy for People with disability. This includes people with mental health issues, which is addressing the needs of mental health service users in regard to accommodation, tenancy sustainment and related issues, including at sensitive points in their transition to care in the community. €2 million was provided to address the mental health needs of homeless persons in the Dublin region in 2016, from additional funding secured for mental health in the 2016 HSE National Service Plan. The funding supports care and case management and intensive addiction and mental health in-reach programmes for homeless people in

supported temporary accommodation and in long-term accommodation. The increased funding will also support long-term intensive care for homeless people with chronic and enduring health needs living in long-term supported accommodation that do not require acute hospital care, but have high support needs. The €2 million provided in 2016, continues to be provided in 2017 to fund these additional services for homeless people with mental health and addiction needs.

Hospital Appointments Status

1007. **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. [37567/17]

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.

Ambulance Service Data

1008. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 418 of 4 July 2017, the location in which each of these accidents occurred, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37568/17]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

1009. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing surcharging by some nursing homes for items that should be covered by the medical card scheme, such as doctor on call, and to the ongoing surcharge to nursing home fees for activities even in circumstances in which a person is unable to partake in such activities; his plans to put an end to these surcharges or to have them calculated in the client contribution as part of the fair deal scheme; the position regarding the interdepartmental working group established to progress the recommendations contained in the review of the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37571/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *A Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost.

The NHSS covers the cost of the standard components of long-term residential care which

are:

- Nursing and personal care appropriate to the level of care needs of the person;
- Bed and board;
- Basic aids and appliances necessary to assist a person with the activities of daily living;
and
- Laundry service.

A person's eligibility for other schemes, such as the medical card scheme or the drugs payment scheme, is unaffected by participation in the NHSS or residence in a nursing home. In determining the services covered by the NHSS it was considered very important that the care recipient and the taxpayer would be protected and would not end up paying for the same services twice. For this reason, medications and aids that are already prescribed for individuals under an existing scheme are not included in the services covered by the NHSS, as this would involve effectively paying twice for the same service.

Although the NHSS covers core living expenses, residents can still incur some costs in a nursing home, such as social programmes, newspapers or hairdressing. In recognition of this, anyone in receipt of financial support under the NHSS retains at least 20% of their income. The minimum amount that is retained is the equivalent of 20% of the State Pension (Non-Contributory). An operator should not seek payment from residents for items which are covered by the NHSS, the medical card or any other existing scheme.

Part 7 of the Health Act 2007 (Care and Welfare of Residents in Designated Centres for Older People) Regulations 2013 stipulates that the registered provider of the nursing home must agree a contract in writing with each resident on their admission to the nursing home. This contract must include details of the services to be provided to that resident and the fees to be charged. Residents should never be charged fees which are not set out in the contract. The Department of Health and the HSE are not a party to such contracts which are concluded between each resident and the private or voluntary nursing home.

Registered providers of nursing home care are obliged to provide an accessible and effective complaints procedure. Concerns about additional charges should in the first instance be taken up with the nursing home provider. The Office of the Ombudsman can examine complaints about the actions of a range of public bodies and, from 24 August 2015, complaints relating to the administrative actions of private nursing homes. The Office of the Ombudsman normally only deals with a complaint once the individual has already gone through the complaints procedure of the private nursing home concerned.

I have met with both Nursing Homes Ireland and Age Action to discuss this issue in detail. In order to improve the transparency of these additional charges, I outlined that a schedule of charges should be provided to potential residents on enquiry to an individual nursing home, rather than at the point of admission. Nursing Homes Ireland undertook to advise their members to do so. I have also recently met with the National Treatment Purchase Fund, the Office of the Ombudsman and HIQA to discuss this matter further.

I have asked the Interdepartmental/Agency Working Group established to oversee the implementation of certain recommendations contained in the 2015 Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme to also consider this matter and examine the options that might be available, as part of its ongoing work.

I am committed to ensuring that our older population are protected, that they get the care

that they deserve, and that they have access to all of the information they need in order to be able to make an informed decision, especially at such a vulnerable stage in their lives.

Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision

1010. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health his plans to roll out an IVF scheme for persons with cystic fibrosis genes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37578/17]

1027. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the IVF scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37618/17]

1249. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to support an IVF scheme for couples with cystic fibrosis genes; the measures his Department is taking to support those with CF and to help prevent instances of CF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38643/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1010, 1027 and 1249 together.

As the Deputies may be aware, in February 2016 the Health Research Board (HRB) was engaged to conduct a comprehensive review of international public funding models for assisted human reproduction (AHR). The completed HRB evidence review was published in March of this year on both the Department of Health's and the HRB's websites.

This evidence review examines the public funding mechanisms for AHR in different countries. The review looks at the associated costs and benefits for the funder, provider and patient, the criteria for accessing the public funded service and the basis for these criteria in different jurisdictions. The review does not indicate a recommendation or preference for a specific funding model or for eligibility criteria for accessing funding; rather it outlines the pros and cons of such funding models, the different aspects of models in different jurisdictions, as well as the different rationales underpinning such funding models.

The HRB evidence review will be analysed by officials in my Department in the context of considering policy options for a potential public funding model for AHR treatment. It should be noted that any funding model that might ultimately be introduced would need to operate within the broader regulatory framework relating to AHR.

Work on the General Scheme of an AHR Bill is well advanced in my Department and this comprehensive piece of legislation will encompass the regulation of a range of practices, including pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of embryos. I consider this and the development of policy on public funding for AHR treatment to be a priority for 2017.

Health Services Staff Data

1011. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency locum staff working in the health service, or who are employed directly or indirectly by the HSE; the locations in which they are based, that is, hospital, health facility and so on; the duration of their contracts; their profession and speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37580/17]

1012. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the agency locum consultants in the health service; the locations in which they are based; their speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37581/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1011 and 1012 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on these matters.

Respite Care Services Provision

1013. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of respite care for a person (details supplied); the length of time they have been waiting for respite; the timeframe for respite to be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37583/17]

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.

Ambulance Service Data

1014. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the distance between ambulance and emergency response vehicles deployment posts and the acute hospitals within the national ambulance service, NAS, dispatch areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37584/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

1015. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the medically-advised waiting time for cataract surgeries compared to the waiting times for cataract surgeries nationally and per hospital in the State, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37585/17]

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

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

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, almost 22,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 5,295 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its Day Case Initiative, 2,065 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 954 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 2,496 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 558 offers of treatment have been accepted and 104 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, almost 79,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

1016. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for cataract surgeries in hospitals across the State in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37586/17]

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

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

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, almost 22,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 5,295 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its Day Case Initiative, 2,065 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 954 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 2,496 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the Plan's insourcing initiatives, 558 offers of treatment have been accepted and 104 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, almost 79,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Data

1017. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract surgeries cancelled by the hospital in hospitals across the State in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37587/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cancellation of elective procedures can occur for a variety of exceptional reasons including cancellations because a bed or the clinical team are not available, cancellations by the patient or because the patient may not be fit for surgery at the time.

Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients and managing emergency demand at times is challenging, however all efforts are made to limit cancellations particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

1018. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for cataract surgeries at the Mater hospital in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37588/17]

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

Hospitals Data

1019. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of cataract surgeries cancelled by the Mater hospital in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37589/17]

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

Drug Treatment Programmes

1020. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the work of the operational management group concerned with the continuing provision of services following the closure of ADAPT in Dublin West; his plans to investigate the reasons for the closure of that service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37590/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1021. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect to receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37592/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

1022. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the recruitment of the general practitioner in Sneem; the number of persons who have applied for the role; the stage the process is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37593/17]

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

Health Services Provision

1023. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange to have a person (details supplied) assessed for additional assistance. [37595/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

1024. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive physiotherapy and speech therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37601/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1025. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an urgent hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [37613/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products

1026. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a device (details supplied) under the long-term illness scheme for type 1 diabetes; if his attention has been drawn to the device and the fact that it has been introduced in the UK; if research has been carried out on the amount it could save the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37614/17]

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.

Question No. 1027 answered with Question No. 1010.

Ambulance Service

1028. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the details of the remit of intermediate care vehicles, ICV, when first deployed to provide transport services at Letterkenny University Hospital in 2012; if there has been changes or a reduction to the number and or nature of services for which the aforementioned ICV ambulances are responsible in the years since their introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37622/17]

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

Ambulance Service

1029. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason intermediate care vehicles in County Donegal are not equipped with on-board monitoring devices for the purpose of cardiac transfers in view of the fact crews are trained in their usage; his plans to fit intermediate care ambulances with monitoring equipment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37623/17]

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

Health Insurance Community Rating

1030. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the criteria used for deciding which health insurance policies are recognised for the purpose of gaining an exemption from premium loading under the lifetime community rating system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37625/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There are no criteria for deciding between health insurance policies for the purpose of gaining an exemption from premium loadings - the application of loadings is mandatory and applies to the premium of anyone aged 35 and over taking out health insurance for the first time.

Our health insurance system is voluntary and community-rated, which means that people who are old or sick do not have to pay more for health insurance than the young and healthy. The introduction of Lifetime Community Rating in May 2015 has successfully encouraged young people to join the private health insurance market at an earlier age, and thus avoid late entry loadings of 2% per annum which may apply at age 35 onwards.

Further detailed information on the operation of Lifetime Community Rating is available on the website of the Health Insurance Authority, the independent regulator of the health insurance market, at www.hia.ie/consumer-information/lifetime-community-rating-explained.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

1031. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if the proposed paediatric endocrinologist for University Hospital Waterford has been appointed; if a contract has been offered to a person; if so, when the appointment of the consultant will be made; the start date for the consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37630/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

1032. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if a paediatric diabetes dietician is employed at University Hospital Waterford; if not, the timeframe for a dietician to be appointed to the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37631/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

1033. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health further to the appointment of a second temporary consultant endocrinologist in April 2016 at University Hospital Waterford, the net effect on reducing waiting times for diabetic persons at the outpatient department at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37632/17]

1034. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health further to the appointment of a second temporary consultant endocrinologist in April 2016 at University Hospital Waterford,

the impact this has had on persons who have been waiting more than two years for an appointment; the likelihood that all persons will be seen on a yearly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37633/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1033 and 1034 together.

In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly. *Question No. 1035 withdrawn.*

Hospital Services

1036. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the deficiencies in existing cardiac infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37635/17]

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

Hospital Services

1037. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if general practitioners have access to cardiac laboratory diagnostic testing; the type of cardiac laboratory testing available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37636/17]

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

Hospital Services

1038. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the diagnostic testing that is available within cardiac infrastructure in terms of the location it is carried out; the type of cardiac testing that is available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37637/17]

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

Hospital Services

1039. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the access to coronary computed tomography angiography and cardiac MRI in hospitals; the locations in which these are carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37638/17]

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

Hospital Services

1040. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the access to EP services for

treatment of arrhythmias in hospitals; the locations in which these are carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37639/17]

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

Hospital Services

1041. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade infrastructure for cardiac catheterisation laboratories; the staffing shortages in each cardiac catheterisation laboratory currently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37640/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Procedures

1042. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of cardiothoracic surgeries on the elective waiting lists that have been cancelled in 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of these surgeries that have been cancelled as a result of the lack of intensive care or ward beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37641/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cancellation of elective procedures can occur for a variety of exceptional reasons including cancellations because a bed or the clinical team are not available, cancellations by the patient or because the patient may not be fit for surgery at the time.

Maintaining scheduled care access for all patients and managing emergency demand at times is challenging, however all efforts are made to limit cancellations particularly for clinically urgent procedures.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Delays

1043. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [37642/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Dental Services Data

1044. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE dentists practising in Castlepollard and Delvin, County Westmeath; the number of dental surgery staff operating in Castlepollard, Delvin and Mullingar; and the number of children who have received dental treatment in each area annually in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37643/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

1045. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a surgical appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37644/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1046. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (detail supplied) can expect an appointment in St. James's Hospital, Dublin, for coronary bypass surgery. [37651/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1047. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37686/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Dental Services Provision

1048. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his future plans for the HSE dental service in Ballymahon, County Longford; his further plans to expand the service or to close the service and move it to another location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37687/17]

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

Dental Services Staff

1049. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the orthodontist who provides the HSE dental service in Ballymahon, County Longford is approaching retirement age; if so, the preparations that have been made for their replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37688/17]

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

Dental Services Provision

1050. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to centralise HSE dental services in County Longford; if so, the reason therefore; if persons have been informed of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37689/17]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

1051. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the primary care centre in Tuam, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37690/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has advised that Tuam PCC is in construction and is expected to be operational by the end of Q4 2017.

Primary Care Centres

1052. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the location in which the staff for the primary care centre in Tuam, County Galway will come from; if the centre will receive additional new staff or if there will be no new hires and staff will instead be moved from areas in the locality to the centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37691/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres, other Primary Care facilities, and the services provided therein, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1053. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical appointment for a person (details supplied). [37697/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Admissions

1054. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the provision of a specific medical item for a person (details supplied). [37698/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1055. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[37699/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 1056 answered with Question No. 946.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

1057. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the provision of a new 96 bed block for University Hospital Limerick; the expected timeframe for the design stage to be completed; if construction of the block is included in the HSE's capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37702/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A capital project to develop a ward block to provide 96 replacement in-patient bed at University Hospital Limerick (UHL) has been included in the HSE's multi-annual Capital Plan. Future investment in hospitals must be considered within the overall acute hospital sector infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place.

Hospital Appointments Status

1058. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37704/17]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

1059. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite extra home help hours for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37706/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Services Provision

1060. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the progress by his Department to accelerate early assessment and intervention for children with special needs. [37709/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Provision

1061. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the services available to support persons with mental health issues to secure accommodation and employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37711/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Government, both through its commitment to the continued implementation of A Vision for Change and in line with the Programme for Government, supports access by mental health users to other health and personal social services, where their needs are consistent with their entitlements generally.

In relation to housing and tenancy supports, the Department of Health and the HSE participate in the implementation monitoring group for the Housing Strategy for People with disability, including people with mental health issues, which is addressing the needs of mental health service users in regard to accommodation, tenancy sustainment and related issues, including at sensitive points in their transition to care in the community.

€2 million was provided to address the mental health needs of homeless persons in the Dublin region in 2016, from additional funding secured for mental health in the 2016 HSE National Service Plan. The funding supports care and case management and intensive addiction and mental health in-reach programmes for homeless people in supported temporary accommodation and in long-term accommodation. The increased funding will also support long-term intensive care for homeless people with chronic and enduring health needs living in long-term supported accommodation that do not require acute hospital care, but have high support needs. The €2 million provided in 2016 will continue to be provided in 2017 onwards to fund these additional services for homeless people with mental health and addiction needs.

There is also a range of supports for people with mental health difficulties who wish to seek

employment. These include the EmployAbility Service, which helps people with disabilities find work and offers them ongoing support, including job coaches throughout their employment, and the Community Services Programme, which aims to address disadvantage by supporting local community activity and providing local employment opportunities for certain groups of people, including people with disabilities.

In addition to this, a Genio-funded partnership project between the Department of Social Protection, the HSE and Mental Health Reform, entitled the 'Integrating Employment and Mental Health Support' (IEMHS) project has recently been completed. The project aimed to demonstrate how existing mental health and supported employment (Employability) services can fulfil the best practice Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment through improved integration. This project went beyond current criteria for Employability services by allowing participating service users to avail of supported employment regardless of 'job readiness' and through integrating the Job Coach into the mental health team. The project ran for two years from 1 June, 2015 to 31 May, 2017, and a final report is currently being prepared on the pilot.

Accident and Emergency Services Provision

1062. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the poor conditions facing persons attending our emergency departments who are at risk of suicide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37712/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Home Help Service

1063. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the funding for home help in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath for each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37713/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Addiction Treatment Services

1064. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make a provision for gambling addictions in the next HSE service plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37714/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The National Service Plan 2017 sets out the services provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) for people with addiction issues. People who present to the HSE for addiction treatment for gambling are offered the same range of interventions as those who present with a drug and alcohol addiction, or a mental health concern, including an initial assessment, a comprehensive assessment, and individual counselling. Counselling and rehabilitation services provide care to those presenting with a gambling addiction through one to one counselling, financial advice and on-

ward referral to other services and supports where appropriate, such as Gamblers Anonymous.

In addition, the HSE provides funding to a number of voluntary sector providers who, in addition to treating drug and alcohol addictions, also treat gambling addiction.

Addiction Treatment Services

1065. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding and services available in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath for young persons who use drugs and are addicted to drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37715/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Funding

1066. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the amount of additional funding his Department will provide to mental health services here and in particular Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. [37716/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Services Provision

1067. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the request for full time residential care for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37717/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Support Services Provision

1068. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will intervene and provide funding and instruct the HSE to ensure the completion of the group home for women with physical and sensory disabilities in a location (details supplied). [37730/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Govern-

ment is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Support Services Provision

1069. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure further resources for respite care for persons with autism or intellectual disabilities in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37754/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Provision

1070. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure continuing respite services for school leavers with autism or intellectual disabilities who often have very reduced services available once they leave school, although their needs stay the same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37755/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1071. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will advise on a procedure

for a person (details supplied). [37760/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1072. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a hospital waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37763/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families. Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE, in conjunction with the NTPF, to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. These plans have been published and their implementation is ongoing. The Inpatient/Daycase and Outpatient Plans focus on reducing the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. The NTPF is currently rolling out its Waiting List Initiative focused on supporting the delivery of the HSE's Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List Action Plan

Hospital Appointments Status

1073. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied) who has been waiting a considerable period of time. [37766/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Food

1074. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if hospital catering facilities are made aware of a person's health issues, including those patients who are diabetic, before serving food to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37773/17]

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

Question No. 1075 answered with Question No. 890.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1076. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to adding conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, pulmonary fibrosis and motor neuron disease to the list of applicable conditions in the long-term illness scheme as part of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37776/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

1077. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the introduction of statutory registration for counselling and psychotherapy services under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. [37780/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I recently concluded a public consultation on my proposal to regulate counsellors generally under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. On foot of the consultation process, I have decided to proceed with the designation of two distinct professions under the Act, that of counsellor and psychotherapist. Each will have its own register under one registration board. This decision has been communicated to the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, the relevant professional bodies and all the respondents to the public consultation process.

I expect that the draft regulations to designate the professions and to establish the registration board will be ready for submission to the Houses of the Oireachtas for their approval during the forthcoming session. Subject to the approval of the Houses, the next step will be the appointment of the 13 members of the registration board following the submission of suitable candidates for my consideration by the Public Appointments Service. I hope that the registration board will be in a position early in the New Year to begin the task of drafting the various bye-laws to allow it to establish its registers.

Hospital Appointments Status

1078. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37785/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1079. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for hip surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37797/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1080. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37802/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond

to you directly.

Health Services

1081. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a place in a centre for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37804/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

1082. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that all outpatient appointments in May 2017 were cancelled at the eye and ear hospital in Dublin; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that appointments are not being issued and there is no indication of when appointments will be issued in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37816/17]

1083. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an impediment to issuing outpatient appointments since mid-September 2016 at the eye and ear hospital in Dublin; the reason no outpatient appointments are being issued in view of the fact that the medical issues are both urgent and complex; the strategies in place to resolve the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37817/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1082 and 1083 together.

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

Medicinal Products

1084. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health in view of the anecdotal evidence of significant use of self sourced PrEP, the steps he is taking to ensure the information and clinical monitoring services are available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37821/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As clinical monitoring and information in relation to PrEP are service issues, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products

1085. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 960 of 2 May 2017, the work of the PrEP working group; the membership of this group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37822/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this ques-

tion relates to a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy

Departmental Bodies

1086. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of work of the sexual health implementation group and the sexual health clinical advisory group; the number of meetings each group has had since 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37823/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this question relates to a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 1087 answered with Question No. 946.

Health Services Reform

1088. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will respond to recent media reports (details supplied) of his plans to appoint a health tsar; the specific remit of this role; the timeframe for their appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37825/17]

1089. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the establishment of a clinic (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37826/17]

1238. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the actions he has taken to implement the recommendations in the Sláintecare report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38481/17]

1287. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the steps he has taken in respect of the cross-party Sláintecare plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38990/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1088, 1089, 1238 and 1287 together.

As the Deputies are aware, I supported the establishment of the cross-party Committee on the Future of Healthcare and have consistently supported its work. I have welcomed the publication of the Sláintecare report and in particular I have been encouraged by the level of cross party and stakeholder support that it has attracted.

I am committed to making tangible and sustainable improvements in our health services and the Committee's work now provides a framework to do this. I have briefed Government colleagues on the report and I have received approval to move ahead with the establishment of a Sláintecare programme office. This office will be tasked with implementing a programme of reform, as agreed by Government, arising from the Sántecare Report. It will be led by a senior executive with the appropriate experience and skillset. I expect the recruitment process to commence very shortly. Recruitment will be by way of open competition.

In parallel, work is underway to develop a detailed response to the report for consideration by Government in December. The report is wide reaching and it is important that appropriate time is allowed for it to be fully considered and for implementation arrangements to be properly designed.

As set out at the outset, we now have a level of consensus and support for delivering a real improvement in our health services that is unprecedented. I look forward to continued constructive engagement across all parties on this very important agenda.

Health Care Professionals

1090. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the meeting he has had with representatives of the physiotherapy and physical therapy represented organisations regarding the Health and Social Care Professions (Amendment) Bill 2017; the progress he has made in advancing the Bill since Committee Stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37828/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health and Social Care Professions (Amendment) Bill 2017 passed Committee stage in Dáil Éireann on 11 July without amendment.

In the course of the Committee Stage debate I indicated that my Department would, in advance of Report Stage, engage further with the two professional bodies involved, the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists and the Irish Association of Physical Therapists on the areas of concern to them. These relate to the designated professions' codes of professional conduct and ethics and the proposed assessment of professional competence to be set for existing users of the title of *physical therapist* who do not hold the specified professional qualifications. These concerns had prompted a number of proposed amendments to the Bill at Committee Stage. While unable to accept these amendments I undertook to look at the possibility of addressing the concerns of both professional bodies in Ministerial amendments that could be tabled at the Bill's Report Stage.

My Department's officials have since met with and corresponded with representatives of the two professional bodies on the matter and I am pleased to report that I expect to be in a position to table amendments to the Bill at Report Stage in the forthcoming Dáil session.

Disability Services Provision

1091. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37833/17]

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.

Disease Management

1092. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (de-

tails supplied) regarding Lyme disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37834/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the HSE has extensive information concerning Lyme disease on its website <http://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vectorborne/lymedisease/>.

Lyme borreliosis can be asymptomatic or have a range of clinical presentations. Current best advice is that diagnosis should be made only after careful examination of the patient's clinical history, physical findings, laboratory evidence and exposure risk evaluation. Exposure to ticks prior to disease manifestations is necessary for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Since an awareness or recollection of a tick-bite is not always present, however, this should not exclude the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Later stages require the use of antibody detection tests (or advanced DNA detection techniques). Testing for Lyme Disease is undertaken in most of the larger hospitals in Ireland. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Public Health England Porton Down facility which uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities. This involves a screening serological test followed by a confirmatory serological test.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered. In Ireland, treatment by most clinicians is based on that laid out in evidence-based guidelines for the management of patients with Lyme disease, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (formerly known as human granulocytic ehrlichiosis), and babesiosis published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) in 2006. This pharmacological regime can be summarised thus:

- Doxycycline, amoxicillin or cefuroxime for the treatment of adults with early localized or early disseminated Lyme disease associated with erythema migrans, in the absence of specific neurologic manifestations (ceftriaxone in early Lyme disease for adults with acute neurologic disease manifested by meningitis or radiculopathy);

- Doxycycline, amoxicillin, or cefuroxime for adults with Lyme arthritis but without clinical evidence of neurologic disease;

- For late neurological disease in adults - intravenous ceftriaxone, cefotaxime or Penicillin G.

As testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland there is no requirement for people to travel to other EU Member States to access these services.

Disability Support Services Provision

1093. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will advise on additional hours for a person (details supplied). [37840/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and

plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

1094. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if it is the case that children, including those with special needs, who have been attending the ophthalmic clinic in Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar, are now having to travel to Clonbrusk primary care centre, Athlone, for the same procedures; if he will confirm that it is presently not possible to reschedule these ophthalmic appointments to Mullingar hospital; and if his Department have information on the potential loss of ophthalmic doctors at midlands regional hospital Mullingar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37841/17]

1095. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether is it reasonable that children with special needs are expected to travel to Athlone for appointments; and his plans to increase ophthalmic services at midlands regional hospital Mullingar [37842/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1094 and 1095 together.

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

Health Services Funding

1096. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to an organisation's (details supplied) campaign to invest over €40 million towards community supports for persons with dementia; and if he will consider this proposal in the context of budget 2018. [37843/17]

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 the end of July 2017, a total of 235 people had benefitted from a dementia-specific intensive homecare package and there are 138 people with dementia currently in receipt of a package. 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.

Funding of €1.23 million has recently been secured under the 2017 Dormant Accounts Action Plan to support a number of dementia projects. These include post-diagnostic supports, dementia friendly communities, assistive technology libraries and further exploratory work on the development of a national dementia registry. These measures will help people with dementia to live well in their communities for as long as possible.

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 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 received and noted the content of the submission referred to. I also had a very constructive meeting on 29 August with representatives from ASI. As outlined, such matters will be considered in the overall context of the budget process and having regard to work undertaken in relation to the National Dementia Strategy.

Health Services Provision

1097. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to date on the proposal submitted for consideration from a group (details supplied) in County Donegal; his plans to meet the group to discuss the outcome of their proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37844/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Community Healthcare Organisation 1 has recently appointed a Service Manager for Children with Complex Care needs. The role includes conducting a “Determination of Need” which will look at the wide range of supports currently in place, and the new services required in the future, to support all children with complex needs across CHO 1.

The Determination of Need will be completed based on several factors which include clinical diagnosis, prognosis and clinical need identified by the multi-disciplinary teams supporting each child, which includes tertiary hospitals, regional hospitals and other services.

It is expected that the determination of need will be completed by the end of December 2017. A further meeting with Our Children’s Voice would be appropriate at that stage.

Palliative Care for Children

1098. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of children registered in each CHO area as having a life limiting condition. [37845/17]

1099. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Donegal registered as needing palliative care treatment, end of life care, and associated respite care services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37846/17]

1100. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the existing services for hospice care for persons under 18 years of age in each CHO area. [37847/17]

1101. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the services for hospice care for persons over 18 years of age in each CHO area. [37848/17]

1102. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the palliative care services that exist for children under 18 years of age in County Donegal; the way in which children access these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37849/17]

1103. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the palliative care services for children under 18 years of age in each CHO area. [37850/17]

1104. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the respite services for children under 18 years of age with life limiting conditions and highly complex needs in each CHO area. [37851/17]

1105. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the service level agreements in place between the HSE and services in Northern Ireland for the provision of hospice care for children under 18 years of age. [37852/17]

1106. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the service level agreements in place between the HSE and services in Northern Ireland for the provision of palliative care for children under 18 years of age [37853/17]

1107. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if there are discussions under way between the HSE and services in Northern Ireland to specifically examine cross-Border palliative care, and palliative respite care for children under 18 years of age; if so, if he will provide an update in respect of these discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37854/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1098 to 1107, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Palliative Care for Children

1108. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the recommendations made further to the review of the 2016 children's palliative care programme; the number of the recommendations that have been explored in further detail; and the number of the recommendations that have been implemented to date. [37855/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The evaluation of the

Children's Palliative Care Programme, which was published in November 2016, contains 20 recommendations for the further development of children's palliative care services. The Evaluation noted that the Children's Palliative Care Programme had made a major difference to the lives of children with palliative care needs and their families and recommended a strengthening of the Children's Palliative Care Programme to include more children's outreach nurses, a second consultant paediatrician post with a special interest in children's palliative medicine and a continuation of the education programme in Crumlin. To date, all but one of the recommendations (recommendation 3) have been explored in further detail, and 17 of the recommendations are being progressed. Some of the most significant areas of progress are highlighted below.

The aim of the children's outreach nursing service is to co-ordinate seamless continuity of care between the acute paediatric unit, community services and the child's home. The nurse develops strong working relationships with colleagues within the acute and community settings e.g. paediatric medicine, general practice, community paediatric services, disability services, nursing services, specialist adult palliative care home teams, and voluntary services such as Jack and Jill, Laura Lynn, etc. Two additional Children's Outreach Nurses were recruited in 2017, one in Donegal and one in Dublin. A third new nurse will be appointed in Kerry in 2018.

The Consultant Paediatrician with a Special Interest in Palliative Care leads the specialist paediatric palliative care team in Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin. Preparations are under way to recruit a second consultant paediatrician with a special interest in children's palliative medicine who will be based in Temple Street. This post will be funded by the IHF for the first year, and by the HSE thereafter. The Children's Hospital Group has agreed that the posts will be located in the New National Children's Hospital when opened.

A business case has been submitted to the HSE's office for Nursing and Midwifery Service Development for the continuation of the training courses in Crumlin on caring for children with life-limiting conditions. There is a commitment to provide training to meet the needs of community based adult palliative care teams and hospital based paediatric medical and nursing staff.

The IHF and Laura Lynn have agreed to fund a national coordinator for children's palliative care for a three-year period. Discussions are underway with the Children's Hospital Group and the appropriate Integrated/Clinical Programmes on the job description and the full integration of the role into paediatric services.

With regard to the recommendation on the provision of adequate and needs based respite services, discussions have commenced with HSE Primary Care and Disability Services on the integration of children's palliative care with existing and future in-home and out-of-home services.

The HSE is addressing the lack of available and standardised bereavement care in conjunction with the IHF. A scoping exercise is required to identify existing services and gaps in service provision.

As highlighted by the Evaluation, integration with disability services, primary care, complex care, the new National Children's Hospital and the paediatric clinical care programme is being pursued as a key part of the implementation of the recommendations.

Medicinal Products Prices

1109. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the details of the most recent agreement made with an organisation (details supplied) in respect of drug pricing; the duration

of the agreement; the estimated annual savings to the State; the arrangements in respect of the funding of new medicines; the savings achieved to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37860/17]

1277. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the savings that will accrue to his Department in 2018 arising from the agreement with an organisation (details supplied); and the way in which this is accounted for in the fiscal space calculations. [38963/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1109 and 1277 together.

The new four-year Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, signed in July 2016, which is available at <http://www.ipha.ie/alist/ipha-hse-agreement.aspx> is an agreement between the State and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), and is expected to deliver approximately €600 million in savings over the lifetime of the Agreement from IPHA companies and €150 million in savings from non-IPHA companies. These savings have been taken into account in the 2017 HSE National Service Plan.

The new Agreement contains a number of features which represent clear additional value over the terms of the previous 2012 Agreement. The reference basket of countries used to set prices in Ireland has been expanded from 9 to 14 countries and, importantly, includes lower cost countries. For the first time, the Agreement provides for an annual price realignment, which will ensure that the prices of medicines in Ireland reduce in line with price reductions across the reference countries. This will ensure the State achieves better value for money on the cost of medicines as prices in other basket countries are adjusted downwards over time. In addition, the Agreement secured a 30% reduction in the price of biologic medicines when a biosimilar medicine enters the market.

At the date of signing, the IPHA Agreement was forecast to deliver savings up to €750 million from IPHA and non-IPHA companies.

The figures were calculated on a full year basis as follows:

IPHA Savings*

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
€120 m	€160 m	€200 m	€270 m

*Figures are rounded and subject to annual review as part of the annual estimates process based on the most up to date pricing data at that time.

The HSE included a savings target of €148m in the National Service Plan 2017 for drug related savings arising from the agreement and the launch of a biosimilar for Embrel in 2016.

As set out in section 6.1 of the agreement the addition of new medicines to the Reimbursement List will be made in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 and by reference to Schedule 1, the Principle and Processes for the Assessment of New Medicines in Ireland. The new agreement is fully aligned with the 2013 Act.

The HSE has been requested by my Department to provide an update on the savings made up to 1 September 2017 in both the Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) and Acute Hospitals and when this work is complete I will arrange to have detail in this regard furnished to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1110. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37862/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Question No. 1111 answered with Question No. 863.

Drugs Payment Scheme Threshold

1112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is unfair that the drugs payment scheme threshold is the same for an individual person living alone as it is for a family; his plans to change this policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37865/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a commitment to reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual co-payment on the Drugs Payment Scheme and reducing prescription charges for medical card holders. I intend to consider the Drugs Payment Scheme threshold in the context of the health commitments in the Programme for Government, and having regard to the funding available.

Respite Care Services

1113. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to the proposal raised by a person (details supplied) in relation to providing much needed respite for persons with disabilities in County Louth, in view of the lack of respite services in this county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37866/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

1114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if additional funding can be provided to enable a service provider in County Cork to provide additional hours for a person (details supplied) to attend an adult day service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37870/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1115. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied). [37873/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

1116. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37879/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient

has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1117. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37899/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

General Practitioner Services Provision

1118. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners working in Kildare town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37900/17]

1119. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if there will be an increase in the number of general practitioners working in Kildare town in the coming months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37901/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1118 and 1119 together.

As these questions relates to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

General Practitioner Services Provision

1120. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the action taken when a general practitioners moves from an area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37902/17]

1121. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the average length of time a town waits for a new general practitioner to be assigned when the previous general practitioner retires or moves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37903/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1120 and 1121 together.

As these questions relates to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

1122. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37909/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure

1123. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the level of funding to implement the national clinical programme for heart failure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37917/17]

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

Health Strategies

1124. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the proportion of spending on cardiovascular health here; the spending relative to the EU average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37918/17]

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

Health Strategies

1125. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied with the levels of resources for the implementation of national plans and strategies relating to the national cardiovascular policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37919/17]

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

Health Strategies

1126. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure the collection of reliable epidemiological data on heart failure; his further plans to develop a national audit on heart failure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37920/17]

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

Health Strategies

1127. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to develop a national rapid access community diagnostic service for new onset heart failure; his further plans to make better use of diagnostics, such as natriuretic peptide testing and echocardiography; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37921/17]

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

General Practitioner Services Provision

1128. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to design and implement a structured care programme for heart failure in general practice, drawing on the success of the model for diabetes and asthma; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37922/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The Programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

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 is under way and officials from my Department and the HSE meet with GP representatives on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues. Proposals around further structured programmes for the management of chronic diseases are being discussed in this context.

I understand that the discussions taking place are wide ranging and definitely ambitious in their scope. I think it is important to acknowledge that, as with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, these engagements take time. It would not be appropriate at this stage to comment on progress to date. While there will be challenges 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. I look forward to continued ongoing positive engagement with GP representatives in the months ahead.

Health Promotion

1129. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to invest in public health campaigns to raise awareness of heart failure and its risk factors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37923/17]

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

Stroke Care

1130. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the staffing requirements for the stroke register; the governance of the stroke register; his plans to change responsibility for the governance of the register; if he will ensure necessary resources to ensure the stroke register is maintained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37924/17]

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

Hospitals Discharges

1131. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the staffing and configuration deficits in each of the early supported discharge teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37925/17]

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

Hospitals Data

1132. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the rates of thrombolysis nationally and in hospitals in Ireland; the way in which these rates compare with the national key performance indicator, KPI, for thrombolysis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37926/17]

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

Health Strategies

1133. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the consideration being given to telemedicine and telestroke to improve levels of support and quality of care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37927/17]

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

Stroke Care

1134. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the age restrictions on access to inpatient rehabilitation in a number of sites dealing with stroke patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37928/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1135. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37929/17]

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

Respite Care Services

1136. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist in having a person (details supplied) placed in a specific facility. [37946/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

1137. **Deputy Kevin O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for a person (details supplied). [37947/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

1138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with persons (details supplied) regarding the reimbursement of the Respreeza drug. [37953/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE has considered the issue of reimbursement of Respreeza for maintenance treatment of emphysema in adults with documented severe alpha1-proteinase inhibitor deficiency.

The HSE has decided not to support reimbursement of the medicine at the price sought by the applicant indicating that it did not consider the evidence for its clinical benefit to be sufficiently strong, in the context of the proposed cost and budget impact. I instructed the HSE to engage with patient groups directly in relation to this decision.

In relation to the access scheme, the operation of such schemes is at the discretion of manufacturers. As Minister for Health, I have no role in the operation of these schemes. There is no provision in Irish legislation for the approval of patient access programmes for specific groups of patients with an unmet medical need.

I have previously said that any attempts by manufacturers to link continued access, for patients already being treated with a new medicine, with decisions under the statutory reimbursement process is both inappropriate and unethical. Manufacturers should operate such schemes in a compassionate and not a commercially-motivated manner. There should be no link between patient access schemes and reimbursement decisions and manufacturers should be open with patients and clinicians from the outset.

Hospital Appointments Status

1139. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37954/17]

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

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

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

Vaccination Programme

1140. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 531 of 11 April 2017, the position regarding the work being undertaken by the Health Service Executive to put in place clinical care pathways appropriate to the differing medical needs of some children that may require access to specialist services, in view of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of medical conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37961/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware of claims of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women. An illness that occurs around the time a vaccine is given and is already known to be common in adolescence does not imply the vaccine caused the problem. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition. It is important to reassure people that anyone who is suffering ill health is eligible to seek medical attention, and to access appropriate health and social care services, irrespective of the cause of their symptoms. As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine

cannot be held responsible for these illnesses.

As the development of a clinical care pathways for children who require access to specialist services is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Care of the Elderly

1141. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive subvention provided to a care home (details supplied) for the elderly in County Kilkenny can be increased as part of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37962/17]

1142. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive administered additional funds to supported care homes can be increased by at least 10% during the three-year lifetime of the Government in addition to the current annual allowance as part of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37963/17]

1143. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if a working group consisting of representatives of HIQA, supported care homes for the elderly and the Health Service Executive can be established to examine the inspection guidelines that can be applied to supported care homes for the elderly (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37964/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1141 to 1143, inclusive, together.

The level of funding available for the Health Service Executive is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2018 which is currently underway. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Under the Health Act 2007, statutory responsibility is given to the Chief Inspector of Social Services, part of the Health Information and Quality Authority for the independent inspection and registration of certain categories of designated centres. This includes residential care settings for older people. As the Deputy is aware, the Office of the Chief Inspector is independent in its function. As such the type of working group suggested by the Deputy may not be the most appropriate vehicle for considering this issue.

However, in the first instance I will ask officials from my Department to open dialogue with the HSE to discuss the relevant issues of the supported care homes referred to by the Deputy.

The Department will also discuss the concerns of the supported care homes with HIQA in the course of its regular meetings with the Authority.

Care Services Provision

1144. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if full-time residential care can be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37967/17]

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 servic-

es 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.

Nursing Home Services

1145. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a forum involving representatives of his Department, the HSE, organisations representing the elderly and representatives of the nursing homes so that matters of concern across the area can be addressed, in view of the large number of persons in private nursing homes throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37968/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): There are no plans to establish a forum as suggested by the Deputy. However I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Department of Health has formulated new arrangements to implement and monitor the implementation of the 2013 National Positive Ageing Strategy. The National Positive Ageing Strategy provides a framework for cooperation to address age-related policy and service delivery across Government and society in the years ahead. The Strategy highlights that ageing is not just a health issue, but rather requires a whole of Government approach to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and wellbeing of our ageing citizens. The revised arrangements were approved by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 27 October, 2016.

These new arrangements establish mechanisms that will give stakeholder groups effective and on-going access to Government Departments and State Agencies relevant to older people. This includes an annual Forum for stakeholders to identify what they consider to be their key priorities for Government for the coming year and the next three years; and establishing clear channels of communications between stakeholders and relevant Government Departments. In this regard, stakeholder representatives will engage with a named senior official on issues relevant to their remit, in order that the priorities identified by the stakeholders at the Forum can be pursued.

The inaugural stakeholder Forum took place on 30th March 2017, and was attended by civic society organisations who are representative of the needs and views of older people in Ireland. Following on from this successful Forum, the Department of Health has opened a dialogue with each of the Government Departments identified as having responsibility for the priorities agreed by stakeholders to advise them of the issues for discussion prior to them being contacted by the stakeholder representative group. The Department of Health has met with this stakeholder representative group, and will meet with them again in late 2017 to establish progress made and assist with any issues arising.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Payments

1146. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the situation and the matters taken into account by the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, that carry out the negotiations for the State in respect of the payments to nursing homes for persons (details supplied); the consideration the NTPF is giving to the State-imposed increase in costs in terms of it being

reflected in the payment they will make to nursing homes to ensure their continued viability, in view of the number of elderly persons in nursing homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37969/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The legislation underpinning the Nursing Homes Support Scheme requires each private nursing home to negotiate and agree a price for long-term residential care services with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) should they wish to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme. The NTPF has statutory independence in the performance of its function, and negotiates with each nursing home on an individual basis. The NTPF may examine the records and accounts of nursing homes as part of the process with the objective of setting a fair price which delivers value for money to the individual and the State. In negotiating with nursing homes, the NTPF has regard to:

- Costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money;
- Price(s) previously charged;
- Local market price; and
- Budgetary constraints and the obligation on the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. A number of issues have been identified for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanisms by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee the review of the pricing system for private long-term residential care facilities. This Steering Committee is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the NTPF, and work in this area is ongoing and well advanced.

Freedom of Information Requests

1147. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the unit responsible within the HSE for releasing medical reports under the Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act

2003; the number of staff dedicated to facilitating these requests; the reasons for delays in responses and releasing of medical reports under FOI requests; if his attention has been drawn to the frequent lack of acknowledgements of receipt of such FOI requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37970/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Statutory responsibility for the Health Service Executive's compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act rests entirely with the Health Service Executive. If a person does not receive an acknowledgement to their FOI request within 10 working days of it having been received by the relevant FOI Body, they should contact the Body in question to establish its receipt and the status of their request.

The Freedom of Information legislation provides for the right of appeal, by requesters, in cases where the statutory time frames have not been met.

Hospital Appointments Status

1148. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have surgery carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37971/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

1149. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centre projects in the planning consideration stage; the progress of each of these towards completion; the location of these projects and the status of planning permission and general practitioner support backed up by agreements for leases in each case; if further investment is required by the private sector in these areas especially in rural locations; if rural communities are being properly served in a targeted strategic approach; the level of private investment that will be required to complete the preferred locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37973/17]

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.

Medical Card Administration

1150. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the medical and hardship grounds that are taken into consideration for the issuing of a medical card; the number of such medical cards in existence; if there is an over-reliance regarding decisions in relation to issuing

medical cards on income grounds as opposed to medical grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37975/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

1151. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to plans to reduce service days for persons under 65 years of age with physical and sensory disabilities provided at a centre in County Donegal by an established charity (details supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that as part of these plans it is proposed to reallocate resources within the county due to a lengthy waiting list of persons wishing to access services in the region, coupled with the provider's inability to meet said demand based on existing resources; the measures he will take to ensure that service users in west Donegal are not inconvenienced by these plans; the steps he will take to ensure that there will be no reduction in the number of service days provided at the aforementioned centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37978/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Brexit Staff

1152. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37994/17]

1153. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38010/17]

1261. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit-related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38824/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1152, 1153

and 1261 together.

The Deputy Secretary, Policy and Strategy Division, and the Assistant Secretary, R&D and Health Analytics Division are the lead officials in my Department for planning and coordination on the negotiations for Brexit. The Department of Health participates fully in the Senior Officials Group on EU Affairs, the Interdepartmental Group on EU/UK Affairs, and its workgroups as appropriate.

The Department established a Management Board Subcommittee on Brexit in advance of the UK referendum, to examine the implications of a decision to leave the EU. The Subcommittee is chaired at senior level and made up of representatives from across the Department, as well as from the HSE, which is represented at National Director level. In addition to the Management Board sub-committee, an Interdepartmental/Interagency Group, chaired by the Assistant Secretary of the Primary Care Division, has been established to prepare and promote Ireland's bid for the relocation of the European Medicines Agency on foot of a Government Decision at the end of October 2016.

Brexit raises many issues across a wide range of areas that need to be addressed. Work on each specific issue will be led by the line Units with policy responsibility. Units have built up the necessary expertise and contacts with their UK and EU counterparts over time to enable them to examine and address the implications of Brexit in their area. In this way, work on Brexit-related issues is being mainstreamed throughout the Department. The work of individual Units on Brexit is brought together by the Department's Management Board sub-committee on Brexit.

Within my Department, International and Research Policy Unit provides a coordinating function in relation to Brexit just as it does for other international matters and North-South cooperation. The Department has a full-time EU health attaché stationed in the Permanent Representation in Brussels, who is in regular contact with International and Research Policy Unit and other Units throughout the Department. Vacancies arising and resources allocated to Brexit in my Department are kept under ongoing review.

Health Care Infrastructure Provision

1154. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38026/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects. Therefore, the executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to construction inflation.

General Practitioner Services

1155. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding his Department's work to extend free general practitioner care to wider cohorts of citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38087/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The introduction of GP care without fees to

all people over 70 and all children under 6 years of age which commenced in 2015 represents a major step forward in improving access, quality and affordability of health care in Ireland. The Programme for Government commits to extending in phases, and subject to negotiation with GPs, free GP care to all children under 18 years of age.

Legislative changes will be required for any such extension of GP care without fees to further cohorts of the population and the timetable is subject to the outcome of discussions with GP representatives on this and other contractual matters which are currently underway. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time.

Nursing Staff Provision

1156. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a one-to-one nurse through the HSE by a special school (details supplied) in County Mayo. [38107/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

1157. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38110/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Products Regulatory Authority

1158. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if the health products regulatory authority is engaged in the development of risk mitigation strategies regarding the

impact Brexit will have on accessing specific medical drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38120/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has established an internal working group to examine all issues under its remit relating to Brexit, including the ongoing availability of medicinal products. As part of its Brexit plans, the HPRA has contacted all marketing authorisation holders and asked them to identify any issues that they anticipate in supplying medicines to Ireland after Brexit. The HPRA has also held a stakeholder meeting and publicly expressed its willingness to facilitate industry in maintaining marketing authorisations in Ireland and the rest of Europe.

In general, companies have not yet taken any firm decisions in relation to the supply of the Irish market post-Brexit, but the HPRA has indicated that it will meet with any company and take a pragmatic approach to managing the issues they might face. The HPRA is also communicating with colleagues within the UK's regulatory authorities for human medicines and veterinary medicines to explore possible co-operation on common UK/Irish products, such as joint labeling, to minimize the impact of Brexit. Separately to these preparations for Brexit, the HPRA has commenced a project on managing medicines shortages which will help to support the availability of medicines after Brexit, but in the first instance the HPRA will seek to maintain existing authorisations on the Irish market regardless of their source.

Food Promotion

1159. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the food in school forum will be established; the timeframe for same; the way in which his department is working towards facilitating a cross-sectoral and cross-departmental approach to healthy lifestyles especially with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38124/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): My Department is finalising Nutrition Standards for School Meals, a cross-sectoral and cross-departmental collaboration on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection; the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. These Nutrition Standards will be published later this month.

My Department and the Department of Education and Skills continue to work together under the Healthy Ireland agenda to strengthen collaboration and support the promotion of health and wellbeing and healthy lifestyles in schools – including supporting the introduction of the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing area of learning.

Question No. 1160 answered with Question No. 901.

Question No. 1161 answered with Question No. 899.

Medicinal Products Prices

1162. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1015 of 20 June 2017, the analysis and risk assessments conducted to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38131/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has established an internal working group to examine all issues under its remit relat-

ing to Brexit, including the ongoing availability of medicinal products. As part of its Brexit plans, the HPRA has contacted all marketing authorisation holders and asked them to identify any issues that they anticipate in supplying medicines to Ireland after Brexit. The HPRA has also held a stakeholder meeting and publicly expressed its willingness to facilitate industry in maintaining marketing authorisations in Ireland and the rest of Europe.

In general, companies have not yet taken any firm decisions in relation to the supply of the Irish market post-Brexit, but the HPRA has indicated that it will meet with any company and take a pragmatic approach to managing the issues they might face. The HPRA is also communicating with colleagues within the UK's regulatory authorities for human medicines and veterinary medicines to explore possible co-operation on common UK/Irish products, such as joint labeling, to minimize the impact of Brexit. Separately to these preparations for Brexit, the HPRA has commenced a project on managing medicines shortages which will help to support the availability of medicines after Brexit, but in the first instance the HPRA will seek to maintain existing authorisations on the Irish market regardless of their source.

I have also asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy on the issues raised that relate to the agency. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

1163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hearing aid application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38136/17]

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

Health Services Provision

1164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for therapy for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38137/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Public Services Card

1165. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38150/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Public Services Card does not currently play any part in the delivery of healthcare or access to healthcare services. Any future consideration of its use by the health service would be done in conjunction with the relevant

Government Departments and in line with the policy and legislative provisions in relation to the use of the card.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1166. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the possibility of including motor neurone disease under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38161/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Legislative Measures

1167. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made to commence parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38164/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 was intended to reform and update family law to address the needs of children living in diverse family types. I have responsibility for Parts 2 & 3 of the Act which are concerned with parentage rules for children born through donor assisted reproduction and regulation of donor assisted reproduction in Ireland. These provisions are intended to underpin the rights of the child to information about her or his genetic identity.

The commencement of Parts 2 & 3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 requires the preparation of complex regulations, to ensure the appropriate consent and counselling requirements of the Act are met, in addition to significant liaison with various departments and other bodies concerned with the provisions of the Act. This work is essential to ensure that the process undertaken by parents and donor conceived children is as clear, straightforward and seamless across all services as is possible.

It is intended that Parts 2 & 3 will be commenced in late 2017. Other provisions of the Act which relate to donor assisted human reproduction and related to Parts 2 and 3 will be coordinated with the commencement of those Parts.

Vaccination Programme Data

1168. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of girls in each HSE CHO area who have received the human papillomavirus HPV vaccine in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38168/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been re-

ferred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Vaccination Programme

1169. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to increase the uptake of the human papillomavirus HPV vaccine among girls; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38169/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women worldwide. Each year in Ireland around 300 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 100 die from the disease. All cervical cancers are linked to high risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV) types. In 2009 the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recommended HPV vaccination for all 12 year old girls to reduce their risk of cervical cancer and in September 2010 the HPV vaccination programme was introduced for all girls in first year of second level schools.

Unfounded claims have been made of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women - there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long-term illnesses.

However, these claims led to a significant drop in uptake rates of the HPV vaccine from 87% in 2014/15 to 72% in 2015/16. Provisional figures released by the HSE indicate that the uptake rates for the current year have fallen further to 50%.

The Irish Cancer Society state, that based on national cancer statistics the drop in the rate of uptake to 50% for the 2016-2017 academic year, will have the following consequences:

- The death of at least 40 girls with cervical cancer who did not receive the HPV vaccine;
- A further 100 girls will develop cervical cancer and will require life altering treatment and;
- An additional 1,000 girls will require invasive therapy to prevent the precancerous form of HPV.

One of the most important things we can do is to provide accurate and credible information to enable parents to take a fully informed decision concerning HPV vaccination. We know that HPV vaccine works and that many countries have seen significant decreases of pre-cancer of the cervix as a result of vaccination. The safety and effectiveness of the vaccine is endorsed by Irish and international scientific and medical institutions.

The HSE launched its information campaign for HPV vaccination as part of the 2017/18 Schools Immunisation Programme on 30 August.

The HSE has produced a range of information materials aimed at ensuring parents and students receive accurate information concerning the vaccines, the conditions they prevent and potential adverse reactions. These materials include:

- Letter to parents concerning the programme;
- Facts about HPV Vaccine and Cervical Cancer leaflet;
- Facts about HPV Vaccine and Cervical Cancer leaflet for teachers;
- HPV Vaccine Key Facts leaflet for GPs;

- Poster;

- Memorandum on HSE Administrative role and responsibilities for the Schools Immunisation Programme 2017/2018.

All of these materials have been produced in both English and Irish language versions.

The HSE has worked with a small group of volunteers, girls and young women who have had the vaccine, mums whose daughters have been protected to produce a number of films in which they tell about their experience. Here are the links to the films:

- I'm relieved she's protected – from the mums - <https://youtu.be/vgE89Z84X5kI> I've got the HPV Vaccine – from the girls <https://youtu.be/CwReNjXp-CQ> .

- Get the Vaccine, Protect Our Future - <https://youtu.be/Avx1e-EtsWM> .

- 90 will die from Cervical Cancer every year – <https://youtu.be/AiC8SI7jWAA>.

The HSE is investing in marketing communications at the time when parents are receiving information packs and consent forms in school. This will involve:

- Three weeks of national and regional radio advertising from 30 August;

- Social media promotion;

- Digital search advertising - Google Adwords; Organic social media posts – Facebook, Twitter.

The Information campaign will support the vaccination programme which starts in schools this month. It involves information packs for parents which are scientifically accurate and endorsed by Irish and international bodies. In addition information is available for primary care facilities and pharmacies. The HSE has also a website – www.hpv.ie.

The parents of all eligible girls are strongly encouraged to access this information and ensure that their daughters receive this important cancer preventing vaccine.

HSE Staff Data

1170. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of new occupational therapists who have been placed in the Dublin west area to deal with the high level of persons waiting for first time assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38170/17]

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.

HSE Staff Data

1171. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of occupational therapists placed in the HSE Dublin west CHO7 area in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38171/17]

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

reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

1172. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that there has only been a reduction of 16 persons out of 258 on the full spinal waiting list at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin; the steps he is taking to reduce this waiting list; the number of persons expected to be on this waiting list at the end of 2017 following the appointment of a new orthopaedic surgeon in September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38172/17]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

1173. **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. [38176/17]

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

1174. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made in providing a primary care centre in Lucan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38177/17]

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

1175. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the progress being made in providing a primary care centre in Rowlagh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38178/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has advised that the design team report has been completed. The Executive is finalising the purchase agreement of a site at Colinstown Park School, subject to planning permission being granted for the development.

Home Care Packages Data

1176. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 237 of 18 May 2017, the number of homecare package hours available in the HSE

CHO 7 area for 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38179/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have again asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 1177 answered with Question No. 946.

Question No. 1178 answered with Question No. 981.

Health Services Funding

1179. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of a capital funding commitment for a project (details supplied) in County Cork. [38223/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Funding for Enable Ireland Children's Centre, Cork must be considered in the context of the future capital envelope available to the health service and the overall priorities for future service developments. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place.

Home Help Service Provision

1180. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home help for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38225/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Services

1181. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if an Irish citizen who lives in the UK can gain access to haemodialysis as a public patient in a private hospital in the event that a public hospital is fully booked at time of travel to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38230/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under EU Regulations, all persons ordinarily resident in the EU are entitled to apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC certifies that the holder has the right to receive emergency healthcare during a temporary stay in any EU country as well as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland. This right is guaranteed to all persons who are covered by the public healthcare system of these countries. The European Health Insurance Card holder has the right to receive necessary treatment in the host Member State's public healthcare system on the same terms and at the same cost as nationals of the State concerned. Renal units in this State normally accommodate dialysis for those presenting a EHIC once contact has been made with them in advance of the patient travelling here and the patient's clinicians provide all relevant patient information to the consultants in the receiving renal unit here.

Under bilateral arrangements, patients from the UK can bring evidence of UK residence instead of an EHIC.

For further information on accessing treatments under the EHIC in Ireland a person can contact the Health Service Executive EU Regulations Office. Their contact details are:

EU Regulations Office,

St. Joseph's Hospital,

Mulgrave Street,

Limerick.

Telephone: 061 461 105.

Email: euregulations@hse.ie.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

1182. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding employees of section 39 organisations benefiting from pay increases provided for in national pay agreements, including the proposed extension of the Lansdowne Road agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38231/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Section 39 organisations are not encompassed by the Public Service Stability Agreements and are therefore not obliged to pass on any pay reductions to their staff members or to provide for any pay restoration that may be negotiated as part of these public service agreements. Neither the HSE nor the Department of Health has any role in determining the pay rates or terms and conditions of Section 39 staff. It is a matter for Section 39 organisations to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of their employment relationship and within the overall funding available for the delivery of agreed services.

Orthodontic Services Provision

1183. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will approve and expedite the orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38234/17]

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

Medicinal Products Availability

1184. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the compassionate access scheme for cannabis based treatment; the timeframe for its implementation; if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing hardship that persons (details supplied) are continuing to go through in view of the fact they have been separated from their family in order to access a specific treatment in the Netherlands; the measures he has taken and plans to assist the person in this matter; if his department has had contact with the persons' medical team in the Netherlands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38235/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On foot of the conclusions of the Health Products Regulatory Authority's (HPRA) report, 'Cannabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review', which was published in February 2017, I undertook to establish an access programme for cannabis-based treatments for patients, under the care of a medical consultant, for certain medical conditions including refractory epilepsy. As the Access Programme will be administered by clinicians, I have set up a clinical expert group to draw up clinical guidelines for physicians, pharmacists and patients. This group is due to report shortly and it is expected the Cannabis Access Programme will come into operation later this year.

Pending the establishment of the Access Programme, if a consultant believes that any patient, child or adult, requires a controlled substance that is not a legal medicine, that consultant can seek a licence from my Department. As of now, there are no licence applications pending in my Department. The role of the Minister for Health in relation to the licence application process only comes into play once a valid licence application has been received from a clinician, for a named patient, where the course of cannabis-based treatment has been endorsed by the patient's consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient, and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Licence applications received from medical consultants will be processed immediately.

In the case referred to by the Deputy, my Department officials have advised the patient's carers that it is solely a matter for the clinician, in consultation with their patient and the patient's carers, to decide on an appropriate course of treatment for his/her patient and that it would be wholly inappropriate for a Minister for Health or his Department officials to seek to instruct or influence any doctor to prescribe a particular treatment for a patient.

Similarly, clinical treatment plans should be determined and directed between clinicians through normal healthcare professional communication pathways, regardless of where those clinicians are located. The sharing of such clinical information may help to ensure the treating consultant in Ireland has appropriate access to a professionally documented clinical and medication history for the patient they are treating and could assist in the consultant's clinical decision making process.

Hospital Appointments Status

1185. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38270/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1186. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38271/17]

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

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

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

Medicinal Products Expenditure

1187. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the discrepancy in the estimated savings from a framework agreement with an organisation and his Department as reported in a recent report by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38274/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The new four-year Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, signed in July 2016, which is available at <http://www.ipha.ie/alist/ipha-hse-agreement.aspx>, is an agreement between the State and the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), and is expected to deliver approximately €600 million in savings over the lifetime of the Agreement from IPHA companies and €150 million in savings from non-IPHA companies. The savings were calculated, with the support of an international consultancy firm, on the basis that the alternative to an agreement was no agreement. The option of continuing with the current agreement, as argued in the paper referenced by the Deputy was not an available or viable option.

The savings are a function of the terms of the new agreement. The new Agreement contains a number of features which represent clear additional value over the terms of the previous 2012 Agreement. The reference basket of countries used to set prices in Ireland has been expanded from 9 to 14 countries and, importantly, includes lower cost countries. For the first time, the Agreement provides for an annual price realignment, which will ensure that the prices of medicines in Ireland reduce in line with price reductions across the reference countries. This will ensure the State achieves better value for money on the cost of medicines as prices in other basket countries are adjusted downwards over time. In addition, the Agreement secured a 30% reduction in the price of biologic medicines when a biosimilar medicine enters the market.

A key focus of this agreement was to achieve lower prices in the face of both demographic pressures on expenditure and the continued development of new medicines, many of which pose affordability challenges to the Irish health service and indeed internationally. The HSE included a savings target of €148m in the National Service Plan 2017 for drug related savings arising from the agreement and the launch of a biosimilar for Embrel in 2016.

Drugs Payment Scheme

1188. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the procedure for approval of new drugs for reimbursement by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38277/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies the criteria to be applied in decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. The Act does not confer any powers on the Minister for Health in this regard and the HSE does not require the approval or consent of the Minister or Government when making a decision.

A new Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines 2016-2020 was signed on 20 July 2016. This Framework Agreement incorporates the statutory requirements of the 2013 Act for reimbursement decisions on new medicines. In addition as set out in section 6.1 of the agreement the addition of new medicines to the Reimbursement List will be made in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 and by reference to Schedule 1, the Principle and Processes for the Assessment of New Medicines in Ireland. A copy of this agreement is available at <http://www.ipha.ie/alist/ipha-hse-agreement.aspx>.

Hospital Appointments Status

1189. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38278/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1190. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical assessment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38279/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1191. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38280/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38281/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1193. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38282/17]

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

Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1194. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38283/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

1195. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the reason chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is not included on the long-term illness benefit list; his plans to change the status regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38284/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Medical Card Applications Data

1196. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1197 of 20 June 2017, the number of new medical card applications awaiting processing; the date on which these applications were received; and the number of these applications that have exceeded the 15 day turnaround target. [38318/17]

1197. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1197 of 20 June 2017, the number of medical card review applications awaiting processing; the date on which these applications were received; and the number of these applications that have exceeded the 15 day turnaround target. [38319/17]

1198. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1197 of 20 June 2017, if persons that are subject to a medical card review application will maintain their eligibility status and access to their medical card or GP-only card pending the completion of their review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38320/17]

1199. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of new medical card applications awaiting processing in each community healthcare organisation, CHO, area; the date on which these applications were received in each CHO area; and the number of these applications that have exceeded the 15 day turnaround target. [38321/17]

1200. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that hold a full medical card and GP-only card, respectively, in County Louth. [38322/17]

1201. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card applications received from persons in County Louth in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of these applications which were refused; and the number of these applications which resulted in provision of a medical card [38323/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1196 to 1201, inclusive, together.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine these matters 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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

1202. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the addition of a drug (details supplied) to the general medical services, GMS, scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38337/17]

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

Hospital Services

1203. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the reason a decision was taken to close the chapel at St Joseph's Hospital, Stranorlar which served the Church of Ireland community and other minority faiths; the further reason no consultation took place with the minority faith groups before the plan was published and the decision taken; his views

on whether this practice is acceptable on the part of a an agency of State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38338/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Overcrowding

1204. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Health the number of times the full capacity protocol was exercised at Letterkenny University Hospital between 1 January 2017 and 31 August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38340/17]

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.

Disability Services Data

1205. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of applications before disability service providers by persons requesting respite and full-time residential care for family members that cannot be fulfilled due to budgetary constraints. [38341/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

State Bodies Data

1206. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the annual percentage of staff of non-commercial State sponsored bodies under the remit of his Department that were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38364/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This information is being sought from the Non-Commercial State Agencies under the aegis of the Department, and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Hospital Appointments Status

1207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38370/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Delays

1208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38372/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Departmental Staff Data

1209. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38388/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter as it relates to their staff. The information regarding the Non-Commercial State Agencies is being sought, and will be forwarded to the Deputy once collated.

Hospital Appointments Status

1210. **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. [38392/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Drugs Payment Scheme Data

1211. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure incurred by the State in the provision of anti-depressant medication in each of the years 2011 to 2016 by scheme (details supplied); and the expenditure incurred on generics, branded generics, proprietaries with equivalent generics and proprietaries without equivalent generics, in tabular form. [38393/17]

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.

Hospitals Building Programme

1212. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if recent newspaper reports that he plans to build three new public hospitals which would carry out only non-emergency operations are accurate; the number of beds that would be provided by such hospitals; the general regional location of each hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38394/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My recent comments in relation to the need for new hospital facilities were simply an acknowledgement that our hospital services are under increasing pressure. It is clear that those pressures are only going to increase as our population continues to grow and age. It is also clear that there is a continuing tension within our hospital services between elective and emergency activities with hospitals drawing on the same finite resources. I believe there is merit in the concept of elective-only hospitals, and that this is the international experience, for example in Scotland. This concept would align with the current work on progressing a strategic and integrated service delivery approach at Hospital Group level, and the recommendations of the Slaintecare report and will be given further consideration.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department is currently undertaking a capacity review. The review is examining key elements of primary and community care capacity in addition to hospital capacity. Stakeholder consultation and international benchmarking are two important parts of the process. The outcomes of the review will provide a basis for determining the extent of capacity requirements over the next 15 years and the type of capacity that is needed at a national and regional level. I expect the review to be advanced sufficiently to inform the mid-term review of the capital programme and the development of the new 10 year capital plan later this year.

Disability Services Data

1213. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons, under

18 years of age, 18 to 65 years of age and over 65 years of age, waiting for an initial disability assessment in County Louth. [38404/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Data

1214. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for an initial assessment for respite services in County Louth; and the number of persons who have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months for this assessment. [38405/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Respite Care Services Data

1215. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for an initial assessment for respite services in County Louth under 18 years of age, 18 to 65 years of age and over 65 years of age. [38406/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Data

1216. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting for an initial assessment for day care services in County Louth; and the number of persons who have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months for this assessment. [38407/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Services Data

1217. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons, under 18 years of age, 18 to 65 years of age and over 65 years of age, waiting for an initial assessment for day care services in County Louth. [38408/17]

1218. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the services available to persons with a disability in County Louth. [38409/17]

1235. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial disability assessment in County Louth; and the number of persons that have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months, respectively, for this assessment. [38433/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1217, 1218 and 1235 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Data

1219. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the scheduled respite services available to persons with a disability in County Louth under 18 years of age, 18 to 65 years of age and over 65 years of age; and the services that cater specifically for persons with an intellectual disability. [38410/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for

people with disabilities.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Data

1220. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the emergency respite services available to persons with a disability in County Louth under 18 years of age, 18 to 65 years of age and over 65 years of age; and the services that cater specifically for persons with an intellectual disability. [38411/17]

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.

Medical Card Data

1221. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children with medical cards in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38413/17]

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.

Medical Card Data

1222. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical card holders under 18 years of age who are prescribed with anti-depressants in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38414/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Delays

1223. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hos-

pital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38415/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Delays

1224. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38416/17]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1225. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38423/17]

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 the directly.

Occupational Therapy Data

1226. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for occupational therapy in County Louth; and the number who have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months respectively for this assessment. [38424/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy Data

1227. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an appointment for occupational therapy in County Louth; and the number of these persons who are aged under 18 years, aged 18 to 65 years and aged over 65 years, respectively. [38425/17]

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.

Occupational Therapy Data

1228. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for occupational therapy in County Louth that are aged under 18 years, 18 to 65 years and over 65 years, respectively. [38426/17]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

1229. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for speech and language therapy in County Louth; and the number of persons that have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months for this assessment, respectively. [38427/17]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

1230. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an appointment for speech and language therapy in County Louth; and the number of persons that have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months for this assessment, respectively. [38428/17]

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

Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists

1231. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for speech and language therapy in County Louth that are aged under 18 years, 18 to 65 years and over 65 years, respectively. [38429/17]

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.

HSE Data

1232. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an initial assessment for physiotherapy services in County Louth; and the number of persons that have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months for this assessment, respectively. [38430/17]

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.

HSE Data

1233. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an appointment for physiotherapy in County Louth; and the number of persons that have been waiting for three months, six months, 12 months and in excess of 12 months for this assessment, respectively. [38431/17]

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.

HSE Data

1234. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting an appointment for physiotherapy in County Louth that are aged under 18 years, 18 to 65 years and over 65 years, respectively. [38432/17]

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

Question No. 1235 answered with Question No. 1217.

Hospitals Funding

1236. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health his plans in advance of the winter season at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda and Louth County Hospital, Dundalk; the additional resources, staffing and funding that will be allocated to roll out this initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38434/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Demand in Emergency Department's (ED's) reaches a more intense peak during the winter period. Therefore there is a requirement for winter planning and preparedness to be undertaken, to provide assurance that safe and effective care will be provided over the winter months given the additional anticipatory pressures arising from for example Influenza, Norovirus, severe weather and holiday periods.

As such Hospital Groups, Community Health Organisations and hospitals are all currently in the process of developing integrated winter plans to cover the period October 2017 to March 2018. These plans will be submitted to the HSE for approval in the coming weeks.

In relation to the specific plan for Our Ladies of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda and Louth, as this is a service matter I am referring it for direct answer to the HSE.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

1237. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses successfully recruited to CHO area 8 and CHO area 9 since the 2015 launch of the Bring Them Home campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38437/17]

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

Question No. 1238 answered with Question No. 1088.

General Practitioner Services

1239. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to develop a scheme for sustainable rural general practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38482/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services, especially in remote rural areas and also in disadvantaged urban areas, and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. I want to ensure that existing GP services are retained and that general practice remains an attractive career option for newly-qualified GPs in all areas of the country.

An enhanced supports package for rural GP practices was introduced in May 2016. The new Rural Practice Support Framework includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216 to €20,000 per annum. Over 300 GPs now benefit from rural practice supports under this Framework. This is a significant increase on the 167 GPs who received the Rural Practice Allowance prior to the introduction of the new Framework last year.

It is acknowledged that there are many challenges in general practice. That is why I have repeatedly emphasised the need for a new GP services contract which will help modernise our

health service and develop a strengthened primary care sector. The next phase of engagement on a new GP contract is under way and the sustainability of general practice in rural areas will be considered in this context. The process will also seek to introduce further measures aimed at making general practice a fulfilling and rewarding career option into the future.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Data

1240. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the type of procedures and the number of each type of procedure which have been carried out under the national treatment purchase fund to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38483/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. These plans have been published and their implementation is ongoing. In addition, the NTPF is currently rolling out its Daycase Waiting List Initiative focused on those waiting longest for daycase treatment.

The NTPF has advised that, as of 6 September, the number of procedures undertaken through NTPF funding in 2017 are as follows:

NTPF Insourcing in Public Hospitals:

Procedure	CANs issued	Offers Accepted	Surgery Complete
Dental	120	60	2
Cystoscopies	655	10	
Angiograms	412		
Cataracts	942	412	102
Carpal Tunnel Release	15	9	
Hip Replacement	49	7	
Knee Replacement	35	12	
Knee Arthroscopy	46	28	
Inguinal Hernia	52		
Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy	71		
Veins	82	20	
Gynaecology	6		
Urology	11		
Total as of 6 September 2017	2,496	558	104

NTPF Outsourcing to Private Hospitals:

Procedure	CANs issued	Offers Accepted	Surgery Complete
Cataracts	3,356	1,427	707

Septoplasty	89	50	20
Angiograms	412	165	93
Lesions	449	95	9
Cystoscopy	272	43	20
Veins	537	251	84
DCR (Eye Procedure)	12	6	3
Vasectomy	33	15	11
Entropian	52	11	6
Ectropian	32	2	1
Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ)	51		
Total as of 6 September 2017	5,295	2,065	954

Vaccination Programme

1241. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE indemnified a pharmaceutical company against litigation in the event of vaccines causing damaging adverse reactions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38484/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The contracts for the supply of pandemic influenza vaccine during the 2009 pandemic included clauses concerning indemnification of the manufacturers. As all of the vaccines used in the States immunisation programmes have been approved for use in the European Union by the European Medicines Agency there is no requirement for indemnity.

Nursing Home Services

1242. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the reason a nursing home (details supplied) does not have a medical officer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38485/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

1243. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if he will include phase 3C of Naas General Hospital in his capital requests under the mid-term review of the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38510/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department's mid-term review submission includes this project and many others. Funding for this project will be considered in the context of the future capital envelope for the health service and the overall priorities for future service development in the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group.

Hospitals Building Programme

1244. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health when works will commence at Saint Patrick's Hospital, Cashel, County Tipperary, as part of the capital funding already allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38545/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Capital Programme announced in January 2016 provides for the replacement and refurbishment of 90 public nursing homes across the country over the next five years, including St. Patrick's Hospital, Cashel. Under this Programme, it is proposed to deliver a new build community nursing home by 2021. This will replace existing beds where the physical environment requires substantial improvement.

This project is currently at appraisal stage and is proceeding according to capital planning guidelines. As the project is being delivered by means of a Public Private Partnership mechanism, which is at an early stage of the development, it is not possible to give a detailed timeline for the delivery of each stage of the project. Assuming that there are no construction related issues encountered, it is expected that the facility will be operational by Q3-Q4 2021.

Home Care Packages Data

1245. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of home support 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 the situation is being reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38551/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

1246. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38555/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospitals Funding

1247. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of respite 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; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38557/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

1248. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to the Tallaght drugs and alcohol task force in each of the years 2011 to 2017, inclusive; the projected funding for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38595/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The budget allocation for the Tallaght Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force from the Drugs Initiative of the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive in each of the years referred to by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

	2011 DOH	2012 DOH	2013 DOH	2014 DOH	2014 HSE	2015 DOH	2015 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE
Tallaght	€1,281,356	€1,250,347	€1,262,837	€452,712	€782,240	€341,438	€893,514	€336,022	€898,930	€336,022	€898,930
Total	€1,281,356	€1,250,347	€1,262,837	€1,234,952		€1,234,952		€1,234,952		€1,234,952	

Funding for 2018 will be determined in the context of the estimates process.

Question No. 1249 answered with Question No. 1010.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

1250. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 130 dentists for the public health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38649/17]

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

Health Services Staff Recruitment

1251. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full year cost of recruiting an additional 20 full-time bereavement counsellors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38650/17]

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

European Medicines Agency

1252. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the

State's bid to host the European Medicines Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38662/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On 31 July 2017, Ireland officially submitted its proposal for Dublin to be the new host city of the European Medicines Agency to the European Council and the European Commission. The bid was developed by a cross-sectoral working group, led by my Department, with colleagues from the Department of the Taoiseach and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as representatives from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), IDA Ireland and other Government Departments.

Whole-of-Government support is a key factor in the bid in order to provide confidence to the EMA and its staff that the work of the Agency will be protected during and after transition, and that staff will be assisted in relocating to Dublin. The Government has shown its commitment to the proposal by offering financial support and a family relocation package, a commitment to provide office space for an advance party from the EMA and a dedicated transition team to work with them in the relocation process.

I firmly believe that the proposal meets the criteria agreed by the Council. Relocation of the EMA to Dublin provides the best opportunity to main business continuity of the Agency and provides the best option for the staff and their families.

Dublin offers an unmatched opportunity as the new seat of the EMA. Dublin has excellent air connectivity with EU capitals and internationally to serve the needs of the 30,000 visitors per annum hosted by the Agency. The bid identified three high-quality office locations which are within a short distance of both the airport and the city centre. Dublin has all the amenities of a modern capital city and is an open, safe, friendly multicultural environment with excellent educational and employment opportunities.

Dublin provides the EMA with a politically stable environment and Irish public support for the EU remains very high. As a member of the Eurozone, Ireland also offers the EMA and the EU budgetary certainty, free from the threat of currency fluctuations.

Ireland's national medicines agency, the HPRA, is highly regarded. It already provides significant support to the EMA and this can be rapidly scaled up in the event of relocation.

I have at all times maintained that the core of our proposal is continuation of the EMA's work and that Dublin can successfully facilitate the EMA's relocation. Since submitting the proposal, the working group has continued to promote Dublin as the ideal location for the Agency.

The final decision on the EMA's new location will be taken at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) in November. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will lead a diplomatic campaign to promote the Dublin bid across all Member States in the interim. I will also continue to hold bilateral meetings with EU colleagues.

Officials in my Department will continue to work in close co-operation with their colleagues in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the strategy to promote the bid and demonstrate why we feel Dublin represents the best choice for the EMA, for Europe and for its citizens.

National Stroke Programme Implementation

1253. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his views on the implementation to date of the national stroke programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[38685/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Clinical Programme for Stroke (NCPS) has been in place since early 2010. The vision of the programme is to design standardised models of integrated care pathways for the delivery of clinical care to ensure sustained quality clinical operational management. Overall, the NCPS aims to improve quality, access and cost-effectiveness of stroke services in Ireland.

The majority of strokes are caused when blood clots travel to a blood vessel in the brain and block the flow of blood to that area. Clot-dissolving treatment (thrombolysis) can contribute to improved outcomes for treated patients, with one-third experiencing important improvements in their ability to walk or self-care and other possible disabling conditions caused by the stroke with sometimes complete reversal of the effects of the stroke. More recently a new therapy, Thrombectomy, has been developed where people with the most severe strokes can have their strokes treated by skilled interventional neuroradiologists who remove the obstructing clots via their blood vessels. This has been shown to halve the mortality and disability from such strokes in some patients.

Some of the achievements of this programme to date include:

National 24/7 access to safe stroke thrombolysis

Emergency thrombolysis is provided to patients in all parts of the country, via improved hospital and ambulance protocols, health professional training and the appointment of new stroke physicians. The national stroke thrombolysis rate has increased from 1% in 2006 to a current rate of 12% (2016).

The NCPS has developed a number of initiatives including a telemedicine programme to allow delivery of expert thrombolysis therapy in smaller level three hospitals. It has been involved in the training of over 250 doctors nationally to deliver thrombolysis therapy and has participated in a training programme for Stroke in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland.

Improved access to stroke unit care

Access to stroke unit care has been shown to improve stroke patient outcomes through reduced mortality rates, reduced dependency and shorter lengths of stay in hospital by patients. Since the commencement of the NCPS, nine new stroke units have been opened, bringing the total number of stroke units in acute hospitals to twenty-two. Two further stroke units are currently in development with a third at planning stages.

Stroke Unit Available n22	Stroke Unit in development / planning n3	No Stroke Unit n2
Mater Misericordiae University Hospital	University Hospital Kerry	Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore
St Vincent's University Hospital	Connolly Hospital	Our Lady's Hospital Navan
Midland Regional Hospital Mullingar	Letterkenny University Hospital	
Wexford General Hospital		
St Luke's Hospital Kilkenny		
St James's Hospital		
Tallaght Hospital		
Naas General Hospital		

Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise		
Beaumont Hospital		
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Drogheda		
Cavan General Hospital		
University Hospital Limerick		
University Hospital Waterford		
South Tipperary General Hospital Clonmel		
Cork University Hospital		
Mercy University Hospital		
Bantry General Hospital		
University Hospital Galway		
Portiuncula Hospital		
Mayo University Hospital		
Sligo University Hospital		

This is a major improvement from the first national stroke care audit report in 2006 which reported one stroke unit in the country. However stroke units are typically too small and the recent national Audit showed that only half of stroke patients admitted spent any time in a stroke unit.

Admission to a stroke unit is a National Key Performance Indicator. In 2016, 65.6% of Stroke patients were admitted to a Stroke Unit.

Early Discharge of Stroke Patients

It has been recognised internationally that Early Supported Discharge of stroke patients from hospital, improves outcomes, reduces need for long term care and increases acute hospital capacity by freeing up beds. It is estimated the 10-25% of patients could benefit from an ESD service.

The programme has helped establish 3 small but effective ESD teams in Dublin and Galway. In 2016, 137 patients were discharged to ESD services representing 15.6% of total stroke discharges. It is estimated that there was an average reduction in length of stay of 10.4 days per ESD patient.

Funding for increasing capacity in the three operational sites has been secured for 2017 with further funding secured to support the establishment of two further teams in University Hospital Limerick and Cork University Hospital. Recruitment of these ESD staff is on-going. University Hospital Limerick is due to commence its ESD Service on 11/9/17.

Emergency Endovascular Therapy – Thrombectomy

Thrombectomy is an emergency endovascular procedure that permits patients with severe strokes caused by clots occluding the major vessels of the brain and neck to have these clots removed using specialist devices. HIQA has completed a Health Technology Assessment which finds that this intervention is value for money. Full report of the HIQA HTA can be found at: <https://www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/health-technology-assessments/hta-mechanical-thrombectomy-stroke>.

Provision of emergency endovascular thrombectomy remains highly specialised in Beaumont Hospital and Cork University Hospital and this model has been endorsed by the HSE, Acute Hospital Division with a view to a third centre when numbers increase as expected.

To date, the number of patients undergoing this procedure has risen annually, on average almost 50% increase each year: 2015=122 cases, 2016=172 cases, 2017 – end of August=154 cases. These patients have been referred from 20 different hospitals around the country.

Stroke Prevention

NCPS has completed an Atrial Fibrillation Screening Study in partnership with the acute hospitals and primary care division. One hundred GPs in Galway and Sligo/Leitrim participated in the study to assess the feasibility of opportunistic screening for the common cardiac arrhythmia atrial fibrillation in general practice. Atrial Fibrillation causes about one-third of strokes in Ireland and a Health Technology Assessment by HIQA has shown that opportunistic screening for Atrial Fibrillation in general practice is likely to be highly cost effective in Ireland. Such a screening protocol is in discussion as part of the new GP contract negotiations. If introduced, Ireland would be the first country in the world to introduce such screening. Further information can be found at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/strokeprogramme/audit/afscreening.html>.

Further developments will be subject to the estimates process.

Brexit Issues

1254. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38696/17]

1255. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38712/17]

1256. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38728/17]

1257. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38744/17]

1258. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38760/17]

1259. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38776/17]

1260. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38808/17]

1262. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health his Department's pri-

orities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38840/17]

1263. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38856/17]

1264. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38888/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1254 to 1260, inclusive, and 1262 to 1264, inclusive, together.

The comprehensive document “Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union: The Government’s Approach” published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response. Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government’s National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy. As set out in the document of 2 May, the Government’s continuing work to ensure that Ireland’s interests are reflected in the EU’s approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland’s strategic response to Brexit.

The Department of Health and its agencies have been conducting detailed analysis on the impacts of Brexit in the area of health. A number of issues are being examined and contingency planning for a range of eventualities is underway. A key issue will be to ensure that there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a cross-border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis. The health sector has a highly mobile workforce and free movement issues and the mutual recognition and assurance of professional qualifications are being considered. On regulatory issues, it is clear that having a single set of rules across the European Union is enormously helpful – to protect human health, to ensure consumer protection and to provide a level playing field for industry. The UK no longer being part of a harmonised regulatory system in relation to food safety standards, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cosmetics could necessitate increased certification requirements or disrupt trade between Ireland and the UK. Ensuring continuity in the supply of medicines and medical devices following the UK’s departure from the EU is a priority. The issue of customs is of relevance as it relates to additional food safety controls and medicines. The implications of Brexit for networks and organisations such as the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, European Reference Networks on rare diseases, or the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control are also under consideration.

These issues are currently being examined by my Department and its agencies and this work will continue over the period ahead. The key priorities for my Department are to ensure continuity in the provision of health services and provision of health services and to avoid, or mitigate against, changes to the current situation that would have a negative impact on human health. These are also key factors in considering the prioritisation of risks.

The Department of Health will continue to work closely with the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other departments on Brexit, and to work and contribute as required to the cross Governmental response, including on the themes identified, in light of the ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement on Brexit is very important. I hosted an All-Island Civic Dialogue on the implications of Brexit for cross-border health co-operation on 8 September. Stakeholders concerned with all-island health matters gathered to discuss the potential impact of Brexit on the health sector, particularly cross-border health co-operation. Contributions made at the event will help to inform and deepen the understanding of the implications of Brexit in respect of health across the island of Ireland.

An extensive programme of engagement with all other EU Governments and the EU institutions is under way. I am continuing to engage with my EU counterparts on an ongoing basis.

Question No. 1261 answered with Question No. 1152.

Question Nos. 1262 to 1264, inclusive, answered with Question No. 1254.

Departmental Expenditure

1265. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38904/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The level of funding available for my Department is being considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process for 2018 which is currently underway. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

EU Directives

1266. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Health the rate of non-compliance with documentary requirements from other EU member states experienced by the HSE related to the cross-border directive and accessing medical procedures abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38928/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare provides rules for the reimbursement of patients' of the cost of receiving treatment abroad, where the patient would be entitled to such treatment in their home Member State (Member State of Affiliation) and supplements the rights that patients already have at EU level through the legislation on the coordination of social security schemes (Regulation 883/04). The Directive seeks to ensure a clear and transparent framework for the provision of cross-border healthcare within the EU, for those occasions where the care patients seek is provided in another Member State rather than in their home country. S.I. 203 of 2014 provides

the legal basis for the Health Service Executive to operate the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland, including the reimbursement of the cost of treatment..

As the HSE has responsibility for the administration of the Cross Border Directive, I have asked the HSE to examine the issues raised and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Provision

1267. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if physiotherapy and other support services will be arranged for a person (details supplied); the reason there has been no follow-up in this case; if the person has been referred as an outpatient or otherwise to REHAB Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38930/17]

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.

Medical Card Data

1268. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards and general practitioner cards respectively as of 1 August 2017; and the number of each type of card issued on a discretionary basis as of 1 August 2017. [38931/17]

1269. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of medical cards in each LHO, local health office, as of 1 August 2017; and the figures for each LHO on 1 January 2017. [38932/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1268 and 1269 together.

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.

Ambulance Service Data

1270. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance attendances at each emergency department nationwide in June 2017; the number of such ambulances that waited longer than of 20, 40, 60, 90, 120 and 180 minutes respectively to hand over patients, retrieve their trolleys and return to responding to calls, in tabular form [38933/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

1271. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for a scan at Letterkenny university hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38940/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

1272. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for gallbladder removal surgery nationally and in Wexford general hospital and University Hospital Waterford in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and the date in 2017, in tabular form. [38942/17]

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

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

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. The Inpatient/Daycase Action Plan is being delivered through a combination of normal hospital activity, as well as insourcing and outsourcing initiatives utilising NTPF funding. Under the Inpatient/Daycase Plan, since early February, almost 22,000 patients have come off the Inpatient/Daycase Waiting List.

The NTPF has advised that to date 5,295 patients have been authorised for treatment in private hospitals under its Day Case Initiative, 2,065 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 954 patients have received their procedure. The NTPF has also indicated that 2,496 patients have been authorised for treatment in public hospitals under the plan's insourcing initiatives, 558 offers of treatment have been accepted and 104 patients have been treated.

Under the Outpatient Plan, since early February, almost 79,000 patients have come off the Outpatient Waiting List.

In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1273. **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. [38944/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

1274. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38945/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

1275. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the procedures in place whereby persons who are in full-time residential care under the HSE and in which family members are consulted regarding their care plan and the person in care making payments to the HSE on a weekly or monthly basis from their social welfare payment for top-up services; the categories of services that are covered by same; the number of persons who are making such payments; and the amount involved on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38951/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

1276. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details sup-

plied) in County Donegal can expect to receive an appointment for cataract surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38958/17]

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

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

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

Question No. 1277 answered with Question No. 1109.

Dental Services Provision

1278. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide information on the midlands public health dental service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38966/17]

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

Health Services Provision

1279. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when physiotherapy services will be returned to a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38969/17]

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.

Misuse of Drugs

1280. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the information available to him regarding the growth in the use of cocaine and crack cocaine throughout the country; the steps which are being taken to address this problem; and the treatment available to persons using this drug. [38980/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): My Department and the Health Service Executive have a range of mechanisms for sharing information about the drugs situation with An Garda Síochána, including the Early Warning Emerging

Trends Committee (EWET) and the HSE Public Alert System for adverse events due to drugs.

The EWET provides a forum for representatives from my Department, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and other relevant experts to exchange information on emerging trends and patterns in drug use.

I understand that anecdotal reports of an increase in the use of crack cocaine and apparent paraphernalia being found have been raised by service providers attending the EWET. The authorities remain vigilant for the possibility of an increase in the use of crack cocaine in Ireland.

The most recent Drugs Prevalence Survey for 2014/2015 indicates that there has been no increase in last month or last year use of cocaine, including crack cocaine, since the previous survey for 2010/2011.

The Health Service Executive has reoriented the addiction services in recent years so that they are capable of dealing with all substances. The HSE is continuing to develop the spread and range of addiction services to achieve better coverage across the country, especially in areas most affected by the drug problem. Treatment is provided through a network of statutory and non-statutory agencies, using a four tier model of service delivery. The four tier model is based on the principle that drug treatment is best provided at the lowest level of complexity, matching the patient's needs and as close to the patient's home as possible.

Drugs-related Deaths

1281. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of drug deaths in each of the past ten years by type of drug in each case. [38981/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The National Drug Related Deaths (NDRDI) index is an epidemiological database administered by the Health Research Board which records cases of death by drug and/or alcohol poisoning and deaths among drug users and those who are alcohol dependent. The Health Research Board published a report on the NDRDI in December 2016, which shows deaths up to 2014, the latest year for which data is available. The number of poisoning deaths categorised by drug group between 2004 and 2014 are set out in the following table:

Multi-response: Poisoning deaths categorised by drug group, NDRDI 2004 to 2014 (N = 3,864)											
-	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
All poisoning deaths*	266	301	326	387	386	372	340	377	358	397	354
Opiates†	131	159	183	190	219	236	190	260	224	251	249
Benzodi-azepines	77	79	116	123	123	136	131	251	174	238	228
Alcohol	125	116	113	172	155	143	152	142	129	140	115
Antide-pressants	54	53	43	48	87	67	67	99	90	121	120
Other prescrip-tion meds§	43	42	41	63	62	60	77	90	103	142	190
Stimu-lants (exc NPS)□	32	46	62	84	68	56	22	35	38	46	55

Non-opiate analgesics	13	23	11	19	18	16	15	21	23	30	33
New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)	0	0	0	0	0	5	6	8	8	30	23
Others/Unknown‡	7	23	21	23	31	42	31	30	28	36	25

*This is a multi-response table taking account of up to six drugs. Therefore numbers in columns may not add up to totals shown, as individual cases may have more than one drug implicated in their death.

† Includes heroin, methadone, morphine, codeine, unspecified opiate-type drug, other opiate analgesic.

§ Includes non-benzodiazepine sedatives, anti-psychotics, Z drugs(e.g. zopiclone), barbiturates, cardiac and all other types of prescription medication(e.g. pregabalin).

¶ Includes cocaine and MDMA.

‡ includes solvents, insecticides, herbicides, other amphetamines, hallucinogens and other chemicals.

Drug Treatment Programmes

1282. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the way in which and the locations in which the additional €3 million allocated to drugs services is being spent in 2017. [38982/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Department of Health allocated an additional €3m to the HSE for drugs-related measures in 2017. It is intended that this additional funding will be used to:

establish a pilot supervised injecting facility in Dublin city centre during 2017;

increase access to buprenorphine/naloxone and buprenorphine products as an alternative treatment for the identified cohorts of patients for whom methadone treatment is not suitable;

address gaps in addiction service provision for under 18s; and

provide more detoxification places in community and residential settings.

I have asked the Health Service Executive to provide details of the locations in which this funding has been used to date and reply directly to the Deputy.

Drug Treatment Programmes Funding

1283. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of the promised additional €25 million for drugs services over the next five years; and the details of the scheduling and purpose of this funding. [38983/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Funding for “Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025” will be addressed every year as part of the estimates process.

Perinatal Data

1284. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the annual estimate of babies born with foetal alcohol syndrome; and the steps which are being taken to reduce this figure. [38984/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): 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.

General Practitioner Contracts

1285. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in negotiating and finalising a new general practitioner contract; the timeframe to which he is working; and if he will expedite this matter in view of the need to expand the capacity of general practitioner and primary care services. [38988/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government’s objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The Programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

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 year olds and over 70’s, the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of Care for adult GMS patients with Type 2 Diabetes and enhanced supports for rural GPs. The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is under way and officials from my Department and the HSE meet with GP representatives on a regular basis.

I understand that the discussions taking place are wide ranging and definitely ambitious in their scope. I think it is important to acknowledge that, as with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, these engagements take 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. While there will be challenges 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. I look forward to continued ongoing positive engagement with GP representatives in the months ahead.

General Practitioner Contracts

1286. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason he will not proceed to make arrangements for the employment of salaried general practitioners in view of the shortage of general practitioners and the need to attract back Irish-trained general practitioners who are working abroad. [38989/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

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 year olds 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. Any proposed model involving salaried GP positions would require careful consideration to ensure the required level of service could be provided to remote and deprived areas, as well as providing a financially viable solution for doctors who wish to work in such areas, without displacement of other GP services in surrounding areas.

I understand that the discussions taking place are wide ranging and definitely ambitious in their scope. 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, these engagements take 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. 1287 answered with Question No. 1088.

Hospital Services

1288. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the private patient stretch targets for each hospital for each of the past three years; the actual income achieved in each case; the number and percentage of private patients which this represents in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38991/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Consultant Contracts

1289. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the arrangements in place to ensure compliance with the terms of public hospital consultant contracts in respect of public and private work; the number of cases in each of the past ten years where the limit on private work was breached; the number and value of all financial sanctions imposed; the actual amount of moneys recouped in this regard; his views on the effectiveness of these arrangements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38992/17]

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

Medicinal Products Prices

1290. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason generic manufacturers are not involved in negotiations on medicines pricing agreements; if he will give consideration to drafting a national medicines strategy in order to achieve greater cost effectiveness for the State and consumers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38997/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The scope of the Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines (IPHA Agreement) is defined as applying to any patent protected medicinal product and any off-patent medicinal products which have not been declared interchangeable by the HPRA. The price of generic and interchangeable medicines are set by reference to the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Ensuring the rational and cost effective use of medicine is a key priority and my officials are currently examining a range of policy options in this area. The drafting of a national medicines strategy, as referenced by the Deputy, will be considered as part of this process.

Engagement and consultation with all stakeholders, including manufacturers, will form a key part of this work.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

1291. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 708 of 28 February 2017, if the recruitment restrictions within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine which resulted in the establishment of a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, still exist; when he expects these restrictions to be lifted; the future of a not-for-profit company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36865/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The moratorium on recruitment ceased for State bodies under the aegis of this Department in the latter part of 2015 and the Marine Institute has discretion over staffing levels via a delegated sanction process, within an overall pay framework, since that time.

It should be noted that the Marine Institute may, in accordance with section 4 (3) (c) of the Marine Institute Act 1991, enter into joint ventures so as to undertake or further the application of marine research and this company is such a joint venture.

The future of the company concerned is an operational matter for the Marine Institute and

I have requested the Institute to reply directly to the Deputy on that aspect.

Departmental Funding

1292. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 709 of 28 February 2017, the sources and amounts of funding to a company (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36866/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has provided no direct funding to this company in the years specified (2010-16 and to date in 2017). It should be noted that the Marine Institute may, in accordance with section 4 (3) (c) of the Marine Institute Act 1991, enter into joint ventures so as to undertake or further the application of marine research and this company is such a joint venture.

The sources and amounts of funding to this company in the years specified (2010-16 and to date in 2017) is an operational matter for the Marine Institute and I have requested the Marine Institute to respond directly to the Deputy on this specific request.

Greyhound Industry

1293. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide financial assistance to a stadium (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36869/17]

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

The granting of financial assistance to any stadium is a matter for consideration by the Board of Bord na gCon. I understand that Longford Greyhound Stadium are in receipt of annual operating grants of €40,000 along with grant assistance towards operating costs, specifically Veterinary fees. The Board recently received a request for additional financial assistance from the supporters club of Longford Greyhound Stadium, which is scheduled for Board consideration at their next board meeting.

Departmental Staff Data

1294. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of employees at decentralised offices (details supplied); his plans to reduce the level of services administered from that office; if so, the number of employees affected; if this proposal will result in a freeze or embargo on other staff wishing to transfer to that location from other Departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36776/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are currently 207 staff headquartered in my Department's office in Cavan. My Department is fully committed to maintaining the Cavan office and has no plans to reduce services from this office.

Following the recent transfer of my Department's payroll function from the Cavan office to the Payroll Shared Service Centre, new work has been allocated to this office and assigned to

the staff that previously carried out the payroll function.

My Department is committed to participating in the new mobility initiative that is expected to be operational in the Autumn. This initiative is being developed as part of the Civil Service Renewal Plan and will facilitate mobility and transfers of staff across the Civil Service. My Department's Cavan office will be included in this mobility initiative.

Fishing Industry

1295. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the record for a person (details supplied) cannot be recognised in each of the years 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017 under the Dundalk cockle Natura permits policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36838/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The qualifying criteria for eligibility for a fisheries Natura permit to fish for cockles in Dundalk Bay is set down in the Dundalk Cockle Natura Permits Policy 2016-2020. This policy is available at the website www.fishingnet.ie, the Government's commercial sea-fishing network portal.

Under the heading "Cockle dredge fishery", point 2 of the policy states: "Permits will normally be issued in the first instance to 'priority group 1' – i.e. those vessels that have already established track record with the Department in the years 2009-2013 or vessels that have acquired the capacity of a vessel with such established track record. No new applications to establish track record will be accepted."

The person whose details are supplied was granted a fisheries Natura permit for the 2017 Dundalk cockle fishery for the vessel Bee-Jay which has established track record.

Marine Institute

1296. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 709 of 28 February 2017, the details of the EU projects and the income supplied by his Department to a company (details supplied) in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36867/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has provided no direct funding to this company in the years specified (2010-16). Details of the EU projects which the company may be involved with, are an operational matter for the Marine Institute. I have requested the Marine Institute to respond directly to the Deputy on this specific request.

Marine Institute

1297. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 709 of 28 February 2017, the details of the contract between a company (details supplied) and the Marine Institute; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36868/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): This is an operational matter for the Marine Institute. I have requested the Marine Institute to respond

directly to the Deputy in relation to the specific information requested.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

1298. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the options open to a person (details supplied) in County Wexford who cannot obtain entitlements for farming activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36871/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU Regulation 1307/2013 provided for the establishment of the Basic Payment Scheme National Reserve to facilitate the allocation of payment entitlements to the two priority categories of young farmer and new entrant to farming.

The person named submitted an application to my Department under the ‘new entrant’ category of the 2015 National Reserve. One of the eligibility criteria for applicants under the ‘new entrant’ category of the 2015 National Reserve was that the applicant must have commenced their present agricultural activity in the 2013 calendar year or later. As the person named had commenced his present agricultural activity in 2001 he was deemed ineligible under the ‘new entrant’ category of the National Reserve and was notified of this decision in writing on 14 March 2016.

The ‘young farmer’ category of the National Reserve is confined to farmers at or under 40 years of age therefore the person named was not eligible for consideration under this category.

Farmers who do not hold entitlements have the option to purchase or lease payment entitlements. Payment under the Basic Payment Scheme is made on the basis of one entitlement per eligible hectare of land declared.

Harbour Authorities Properties

1299. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action which has been taken by his Department to resolve the issues at Howth harbour highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in 2015; if the vacant and unused buildings listed at that time are now in use or leased; if he will list the vacant buildings noted in 2015 and provide the status of each one; if the site at Howth HFC was subdivided into smaller units; if so, if details of the tendering process will be provided setting out the number of bidders and the rents and lease agreed; if all issues identified by the PAC at Howth have now been resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36901/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department owns, manages and maintains six designated Fishery Harbour Centres under Statute. The recommendations in the Public Accounts Committee Report on those Fishery Harbour Centres which was published in June 2015 have been accepted by my Department and have been and continue to be implemented, subject to necessary legal and statutory consent procedures.

In regard to the specific queries relating to properties in Howth Fishery Harbour Centre, one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres, the position regarding vacant properties/sites since the publication of the Public Accounts Committee Report in June 2015 is as follows.

The large vacant site referred to was subdivided into three, one of which was successfully tendered by open public competition in 2015. A further building on the West Pier was also successfully tendered at that time.

Regarding the tender process, there were 6 applications received for the West Pier building, the rent is €5,600 per annum and the lease is for a term of 35 years. The subdivided site received 2 applications for the tender, the rent is €6,045 per annum and the lease is for a term of 35 years.

Currently there are 6 vacant sites in Howth:

1. The two further remaining sub-divided sites referred to above - one is being amalgamated with another larger site to provide for purpose built units for small businesses as deemed appropriate; the second subdivided site is potentially available for tender pending the resolution of an encroachment issue, which is being actively pursued.

2. A vacant property “Mariners Hall” requires significant repairs and upgrade before it can again be considered for tender. My Department is awaiting a planning decision in this regard before works can commence.

3. There are three small vacant stores built into the East Pier which are not suitable for occupation. The structures themselves are very old and in poor condition, they are not serviced by utilities and due to their location in the harbour are not generally accessible by vehicle. The East Pier is also subject to wave overtopping in stormy weather which is a major Health and Safety concern.

In addition there are properties within Howth Fishery Harbour Centre which may appear vacant, these properties are either legally occupied or in a limited number of cases subject to legal proceedings.

Departmental Staff Data

1300. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work in his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36946/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The breakdown of staff as requested is outlined in the table. The information provided for 2016 (June and December) reflects the change of Government.

Political Staff	Dec-15	Jun-16
Driver	6	2
Personal Assistant Min/Min State	3	0
Personal Secretary Min/Min State	3	0
Special Advisor	2	1
Civil/Public Service Staff (Seconded)		
Constituency Office		
Higher Executive Officer	1	0

The current salary scales for these grades are:

PPC Scale

Drivers €35,700.00

Per Asst. Min/Min State €47,016.00 - €60,011.00

Higher Executive Officer €47,081.00 - €59,294.00

Special Advisor (Principal Officer) €79,401.00 - €91,624.00

Non PPC Scale

Drivers €33,965.00

Per Asst. Min/Min State €44,715.00 - €57,060.00

Personal Sec Min/Min State €25,416.00- €48,756.00

Higher Executive Officer €44,816.00 - €56,415.00

Duties of individuals are agreed between officers and their line manager on an ongoing basis.

GLAS Payments

1301. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36968/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full for the 2015 scheme year.

The 85% payment for 2016 has been processed and payment has issued to the person named.

All GLAS 1 participants are required to submit a Farm Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) before the 2016 15% payment can be made. When the NMP on behalf of the person named is submitted the balancing payment checks can be completed.

Departmental Staff Data

1302. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of women and men, respectively, employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37066/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is committed to being a modern, diverse and inclusive organisation that reflects and is capable of serving 21st century Irish society.

We currently employ a total of 3,186 staff members. The breakdown of male and female staff members is given in the tables.

Female	Male	Total
1472	1714	3186
Female	Male	
46.20%	53.80%	

By monitoring trends and publishing data, we are continuously raising awareness of the need for Gender Balance. We are developing our HR expertise and methodologies in order to monitor trends and to provide relevant information to staff, the Management Board and our Gender Balance Steering Group. Our aim is to identify and address any possible barriers to equal opportunities in the Department.

Departmental Staff Data

1303. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of men and women, respectively, in his Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37077/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has 184 staff who hold posts at Secretary General, Assistant Secretary, Principal and Assistant Principal level. The current gender breakdown for these grades is as follows:

Assistant Principal (AP) - 63 Women and 73 Men

Principal Officer (PO) - 15 Women and 24 Men

Assistant Secretary (A. Sec) - 2 Women and 6 Men

Secretary General - 1 Man

However, due to the nature of the work carried out within my Department, our business needs are complex and require a variety of specialised skills. In addition to the general administrative grades, a number of professional, scientific and technical staff also work in my Department and undertake different roles. The diverse mandate of DAFM and the requirement for specialised roles require a broad range of staff with many different skill sets. Some of these roles are highly specialised, making grade comparisons difficult. Salary, competencies and role requirements are the main issues considered when assessing approximate equivalence. There are specialised professional and technical staff operating at equivalent levels to AP, PO and Assistant Secretary across my Department.

Animal Slaughtering Data

1304. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the oversight and regulation of the capture of wallabies here (details supplied) and for the slaughtering of these animals for their meat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37096/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All slaughter plants whose meat is destined for human consumption must meet the standards set out in EU and national regulations relating to food safety.

Large scale slaughter plants and all plants involved in equine slaughter operate under the supervision of my Department, while smaller scale abattoirs are supervised by the Local Author-

ity Veterinary Service, under service contract with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI).

I understand that the food business operator concerned in this instance operates under the supervision of South Dublin County Council. The legislation also requires that a person engaged in wild game hunting activity be registered, and in addition the hunter requires permission from the landowner and a current firearms licence for the firearm in use.

Animal Slaughtering Data

1305. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a company (details supplied) will have a dominant position or a monopoly position in the slaughtering of organic beef cattle here when a merger goes through; the guidelines for fair competition in such a case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37101/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very much aware of the importance of competition in the beef sector. It is crucial to have a robust and transparent legal basis for the evaluation of proposals for mergers and acquisitions.

There is a well established infrastructure, at EU level, and at National level through the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, for the oversight of competition issues and for handling allegations of anti-competitive practices or the abuse of a dominant market position.

I note that the merger referred to by the Deputy was notified to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission 05/09/2017 who will carry out the appropriate investigation into the proposed merger.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

1306. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an oyster licence application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37139/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applications for two aquaculture licences referred to by the Deputy are in respect of two sites located in Castlemaine Harbour, which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive (Natura 2000 site).

All applications in 'Natura' areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. My Department, in conjunction with the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is engaged in a comprehensive programme of gathering the necessary baseline data appropriate to the Conservation Objectives of 'Natura' areas. This data collection programme is substantially complete. This is followed by data analysis and the setting of appropriate Conservation Objectives by the NPWS. Once this process is complete all new, renewal and review aquaculture applications can be appropriately assessed for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The Appropriate Assessment of Castlemaine Harbour has been completed and the relevant licensing determinations have been made based on applications to hand at the time of the assessment.

The specific applications referred by the Deputy were submitted to my Department subsequent to the carrying out of the Appropriate Assessment process for this harbour. Accordingly, it was not possible to assess these applications against the designated Conservation Objectives for the harbour.

The optimum method for appropriately assessing applications by individual operators, who were not included in the initial overall assessment procedure, is under active consideration by my Department. The process must comply with best scientific practice and be achieved in a manner which will be acceptable to the national authorities and to the EU Commission.

In the meantime, the assessment procedures agreed with the EU Commission require Appropriate Assessments in respect of aquaculture activities to be carried out by the national authorities and unilateral departure from these arrangements is not possible.

Every effort is being made to expedite the conclusion of this matter as soon as possible.

Greyhound Industry

1307. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the active and specific steps his Department is taking to stop the illegal trade of greyhounds and the cruelty involved in this in response to recent increases in that practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37212/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The welfare of greyhounds is regulated through the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011 and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. The Animal Health and Welfare Act applies to all animals, whether kept for commercial, domestic, sport, show or other purposes and contains robust measures against the ill-treatment of animals. The Act also provides for increased levels of penalties.

Bord na gCon, which is the State body responsible for the governance, regulation and development of the greyhound industry in Ireland and the wellbeing of greyhounds, has developed a Code of Practice in relation to the welfare of greyhounds which sets out specific standards that all individuals engaged in the care and management of registered greyhounds are expected to meet. The Code emphasises that owners and keepers must take full responsibility for the physical and social well-being of greyhounds in line with best welfare practice.

Where any breaches of welfare requirements are identified under the Welfare of Greyhounds Act 2011, Bord na gCon takes stringent actions and prosecutions ensue in accordance with the Act. A new Greyhound Industry Bill is currently being introduced and the General Scheme of that Bill gives Bord na gCon a very clear role in relation to the welfare of greyhounds including the use of its funds to enhance the welfare of greyhounds and improved investigatory powers in relation to greyhound welfare.

The vast majority of dogs that are moved from Ireland go to the UK. Trade within the EU of dogs, including greyhounds, is governed by EU law. Dogs moved to another EU Member State from Ireland must be accompanied by an EU pet passport and a health certificate issued by a Department veterinarian, be microchipped and have a valid rabies vaccination.

The premises exporting dogs must be registered with my Department in advance of the export. Before travel, dogs must undergo a clinical examination by an authorised veterinarian, who must verify that the animals show no obvious signs of disease and are fit to be transported. These procedures, including vaccination, ensure that only healthy dogs, over the age of 15 weeks, are allowed to be exported.

Exporters must also comply with national and EU law on the protection of animals during transport, while the transport of animals by air is also governed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations.

Bord na gCon has stated that it does not support the export of greyhounds to destinations which do not conform with the standards in the Animal Health and Welfare Act, the Welfare of Greyhounds Act or Bord na gCon's Code of Practice and standards. I fully endorse this view.

Finally I should add that my Department continues to work closely with animal welfare charities on all aspects of animal welfare. Officials of my Department have also met with the welfare members of the International Greyhound Forum, which includes the Dogs Trust and the ISPCA, to consider issues surrounding the export of greyhounds.

Departmental Expenditure

1308. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37219/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The details of charges paid for debit and credit card payment services and banking fees, as requested by the Deputy, are set out in the following tables:

Card payment service fees

Year	Bank of Ireland	Allied Irish Banks
2012	965.92	0.00
2013	756.16	1,395.93
2014	0.00	8,790.48
2015	0.00	12,219.51
2016	0.00	12,748.32
Total	1,722.08	35,154.24

Banking fees

Year	Bank of Ireland	Allied Irish Banks	Ulster Bank	Irish Permanent
2012	1,681.17	15,241.48	0.00	0.00
2013	2,589.19	12,953.62	0.00	0.00
2014	3,049.28	42,894.67	22.81	0.00
2015	2,514.83	48,088.14	227.33	10.50
2016	3,542.56	45,586.55	230.97	0.00
Total	13,377.03	164,764.46	481.11	10.50

The card payment service fees relate to the provision of card payment facilities for customers online, over the phone, at six Veterinary Laboratories and at three Fishery Harbour Centres. Banking fees mainly relate to electronic funds transfer fees for the payments issued to scheme recipients. In line with market trends across the sector, bank charges have increased in recent years.

GLAS Eligibility

1309. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will amend the eligibility terms of GLAS to make it more accessible for new farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37462/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Provision was made under the GLAS scheme allowing new entrants to farming to submit an application to join the scheme.

The target of 50,000 scheme participants set out in Ireland's Rural Development Plan 2014-2020 has been achieved. My focus now is on ensuring that these 50,000 farmers receive their payments in line with their contract under the scheme. There are no plans to re-open the scheme.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

1310. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine If he will review the eligibility terms of the national reserve to make it more accessible for new farmers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37463/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU Regulation 1307/2013 provides for the establishment of the Basic Payment Scheme National Reserve which must be used, as a matter of priority, to allocate Basic Payment Scheme entitlements to young farmers and new entrants to farming.

The EU Regulations governing the scheme also provide that a farmer may benefit from the National Reserve only once during the lifetime of the scheme, which runs from 2015-2019. Individual Member States do not have discretion in the application of this provision.

Therefore, a successful application under the 2015 National Reserve is not eligible to benefit from the National Reserve during the subsequent years of the scheme.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

1311. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will amend the eligibility terms of the sheep welfare scheme to make it more accessible for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37464/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sheep Welfare Scheme was launched in December 2016 with the aim of contributing to the continued development in animal health and welfare in the sheep sector. The scheme requires farmers to go beyond the relevant mandatory standards to enhance the standards of animal welfare in the Irish Sheep flock.

The scheme provides targeted support to those areas of animal welfare identified as making a meaningful positive contribution to sheep welfare, having regard to the systems of production in Ireland and the environment in which Irish sheep production is carried out.

To be eligible for participation in the Sheep Welfare Scheme, applicants must

- have been in possession of an active DAFM herd number, or have applied for same before the closing date of the scheme and keep breeding ewes;

- have submitted Sheep Census returns to the Department in respect of 2014 and 2015 by 31st October 2016;

- have submitted a correctly completed return to the Department in respect of the 2016 Sheep Census by 31st January 2017; and

- submit a BPS application for each year of scheme participation, and comply with the requirement to be an active farmer as per Article 9 of EU Regulation 1307/2013.

The terms and conditions of the scheme also provided for the provision of new entrants into the scheme. New entrants under the scheme are defined within the terms and conditions of the scheme as being an applicant who has applied for a new herd number from 1st January 2016 and before the closing date of the scheme in 2017, or an applicant with an existing herd number who has not held or traded in sheep for a two year period up to 31st October preceding the scheme year.

An applicant's eligible number of breeding ewes is the average number of breeding ewes declared on their 2014 and 2015 Sheep Census returns. Applicants must also declare breeding ewes on the 2016 Sheep Census return. The application of a reference number based on ewes held in previous years was a prerequisite for approval of the scheme by the EU Commission.

This number will form a Reference Number for payment for the duration of the Scheme. This number does not increase over the course of the scheme, except in the case of certain GLAS participants where participants are scheduled to increase their number of breeding ewes in line with their GLAS obligations.

In the case of new entrants the reference number will be based on the number of breeding ewes returned on their most recent census. Where entry is between the census process and the closing date of the scheme the reference number will be calculated on a case by case basis.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1312. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of times his Department has appealed decisions of the independent agricultural appeals office in 2016 and to date in 2017; the reasons for such appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37499/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has requested a total of 25 reviews of decisions taken by independent Agricultural Appeals Officers in the period in question - 15 in 2016 and 10 in 2017.

Requests for review are sought by my Department where it is considered that an error has been made in relation to the law or the facts of the case.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1313. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a review of the case of a person (details supplied); and the timeframe for its completion. [37531/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Office has confirmed that a request for a review of the Appeals Officer's decision was submitted to the Director of Agriculture Appeals.

It is anticipated that the review of the case concerned will be completed in the next few weeks.

Departmental Properties

1314. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the properties at Dunmore East fisheries harbour that have lease or rental agreements involving his Department; and if he will provide information on all income received by his Department from the lease or rent of these properties over the past ten years. [37597/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned and managed by my Department under Statute.

The majority of the properties/sites in the Dunmore East property portfolio are occupied by a variety of public and commercial bodies which support the Fishery Harbour Centre's role as a working fishery harbour in addition to a broad range of other marine activities.

The types of properties in Dunmore East include industrial and marine leisure units, small sites, containers, fishermen's storage facilities, utilities and marine support facilities.

The number of properties/sites in Dunmore East with rental agreements can vary from time to time due to changes in tenancies, expiration of leases and also for operational reasons.

The Department has leases or rental agreements in place on 24 properties within Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre. Rental receipts for the ten years 2007-2016 amounted to some €535,000.

Departmental Properties

1315. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the length of time sites (details supplied) at the entrance to the Dunmore East fisheries harbour have been out of business; and when the last lease or rental income was received by his Department from these properties. [37598/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned and managed by my Department under Statute.

The majority of the properties/sites in the Dunmore East property portfolio are occupied by a variety of public and commercial bodies which support the Fishery Harbour Centre's role as a working fishery harbour in addition to a broad range of other marine activities.

I am not in a position to comment on the financial and business position of individual companies as it would not be appropriate to do so. The sites referred to by the Deputy are currently legally occupied, albeit unused. However, my Department is engaged in a legal process with the aim of obtaining vacant possession of the sites in question.

Departmental Properties

1316. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the tendering process on a site (details supplied) on the west pier at Dunmore East will be available for public submission; and the lease, rental and legal status of same. [37599/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Dunmore East Fishery Harbour Centre is one of the six designated Fishery Harbour Centres which are owned and managed by my Department under Statute.

The majority of the properties/sites in the Dunmore East property portfolio are occupied by a variety of public and commercial bodies which support the Fishery Harbour Centre's role as a working fishery harbour in addition to a broad range of other marine activities.

The building to which the Deputy refers is legally occupied and is being used by a commercial entity and therefore not available for tender.

Farm Data

1317. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of registered farmers over the age of 65; the number of registered farmers under 35 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37648/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The CSO's 2013 Farm Structures Survey indicated that approximately 37,700 or 27% of Irish farmers are over 65 years and 8,200 (6%) aged under 35. A full age breakdown can be found below. These figures compare with Eurostat data for 2013, which showed that 31% of all EU farm holders were over 65 and 6% are aged under 35.

2013	Number of Farmers	% of Farmers
<35	8,200	6%
35-44	22,800	16%
45-54	34,800	25%
55-64	35,600	26%
>65	37,700	27%
Total	139,100	100%

Source: Farm Structures Survey, 2013. CSO.

Departmental Expenditure

1318. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the investment his Department made in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37649/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The investment my Department has made through the various schemes in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath, as requested by the Deputy, are set out in the attached table:

Questions - Written Answers

Scheme Description	County Meath	County Cavan	County Monaghan
Agri-Environment Options Schemes	285,078.75	764,221.94	375,069.37
Areas of Natural Constraint	2,257,763.50	9,273,017.73	7,060,978.65
Private Storage - Pigmeat		74,082.61	
Area Based Comp. Allowance	5,328.35	10,487.74	3,903.22
Suckler Cow Animal Welfare Scheme		232.80	
Beef Data Genomics Programme	1,273,253.88	1,820,305.66	1,277,618.84
Beef Data Programme	6,765.13	12,647.86	4,486.56
Beef Genomics Scheme 2014 Farmer	2,770.00	7,650.00	1,290.00
Beef Technology Adoption Programme		825.00	
BVD Beef	13,340.00	29,130.00	22,390.00
BVD Dairy	2,515.00	995.00	3,190.00
CEDRA 2015		12,500.00	
Collaborative Farming Grant		22,514.04	9,900.00
Control of Horses	20,625.00	1,425.00	5,850.00
Temp Aid - Milk and Milk Products 2015	2,558.00	4,674.00	4,116.00
Dairy Compensation Scheme	48,812.00	68,881.00	52,624.00
Direct Payment Scheme	52,186,700.90	37,003,099.36	29,544,352.78
Fodder Aid 2016		5,575.00	1,500.00
Compensation for Fallen Animals	223,202.66	211,727.94	
Forestry Supp Scheme For Owners	33,579.45	15,719.28	5,887.96
Forestry Other Sup Sch For Owner			1,656.70
Green Low-Carbon Ag-Envir Scheme Tranche 1	1,725,606.99	3,859,842.73	1,861,128.71
Grassland Sheep Scheme	1,644.04	600.59	121.77
Encourage Maint. of Kerry Cattle Herd		400.00	
Improve production - Fruit & Vegetables			1,569,268.49

Scheme Description	County Meath	County Cavan	County Monaghan
Mart Modernisation Scheme		6,972.00	3,338.00
NDP-Dev of Horticulture Sector	197,601.28	10,451.60	248,556.20
NDP-Develop. of Organic Sector	9,860.99		119,208.07
Encourage conversion & maint of Org Farmin	67,306.32	276,688.37	99,514.37
Pig Exceptional Aid	36,300.00	141,900.00	29,700.00
Protein Crop Aid	284,358.71		35.59
Afforestation Programme	1,731,692.23	2,718,036.79	779,763.60
Agri-Environment Programme REPS	60,662.37	187,348.95	37,105.50
Forestry Programme	816,704.85	1,713,352.75	377,375.45
School Milk Scheme	1,400.85	60,785.33	11,532.03
Single Farm Payment	137,905.45		31,491.00
Development Programme for Sheep		2,375.00	
Animal Welfare and Nutrient Storage	1,932.20	526.50	
Dairy Equipment Scheme II (FA 2A)	38,634.80	48,413.21	8,000.00
TAMS Dairy Equipment Scheme	68,005.60	35,957.85	39,077.41
TAMS Farm Safety Scheme	61,847.28	149,930.63	73,002.32
Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme (FA 5B)			12,104.24
Low Emission Slurry Spreading Scheme (FA5)		12,399.18	
TAMS Sheep Welfare Scheme	68,249.35	58,521.17	36,106.62
TAMS Rainwater Harvesting Scheme		7,084.67	
Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (FA)	16,819.50		9,600.00
TB Grants to Herd-owners	826,291.22	465,584.98	738,618.63
Traditional Farm Building Scheme		13,335.49	41,722.25
	62,515,116.65	59,110,219.75	44,501,184.33

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Data

1319. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received for the 2017 areas of natural constraints scheme by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37650/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme a total of 98,012 applications have been received to date. Applications are currently being processed with a view to payments commencing shortly on all clear applications.

The following is a county breakdown of applications received.

County	ANC Applications
Carlow	724
Cavan	4632
Clare	5856
Cork	6908
Donegal	8400
Dublin	152
Galway	11535
Kerry	7446
Kildare	510
Kilkenny	1689
Laois	1624
Leitrim	3328
Limerick	2817
Longford	2275
Louth	766
Mayo	11078
Meath	1309
Monaghan	3880
Offaly	2327
Roscommon	5465
Sligo	3826
Tipperary	4316
Waterford	1377
Westmeath	2572
Wexford	1457
Wicklow	1743

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

1320. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeals pending decision by the director of appeals at the agricultural appeals office. [37707/17]

1321. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of appeals pending decision by the director of appeals at the agricultural appeals office

by the county in which the appellant is based, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37708/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1320 and 1321 together.

The Agriculture Appeals Office is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Agriculture Appeals Act provides that the Director may revise any decision of an appeals officer if it appears to him or her that the decision was erroneous by reason of some mistake having been made in relation to the law or the facts.

The Agriculture Appeals Office has advised that the number of requests awaiting decision by the Director of Agriculture Appeals is 65 according to the records held at 31 August 2017.

I attach a table showing the requests for review by county. I am advised that every effort is being made to complete the reviews.

The number of requests for a review of Appeal Decisions awaiting review by the Director of Agriculture Appeals as at 31/08/2017

County	Number of Requests
Carlow	2
Cavan	1
Cork	7
Dublin	1
Galway	11
Kerry	8
Kildare	1
Leitrim	4
Mayo	10
Monaghan	3
Offaly	2
Roscommon	2
Sligo	1
Tipperary	2
Waterford	1
Westmeath	2
Wexford	6
Wicklow	1
Total	65

Rural Development Programme

1322. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all payments under the rural development programme will be paid on time in view of the severe difficulties facing farmers due to current adverse weather conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37718/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Having seen the situation first-hand, I am acutely aware of the difficulties faced by some farmers as a result

of recent weather conditions. That is why last week, with the agreement of my Cabinet colleagues, I introduced a national stand-alone measure to support affected farmers in the Donegal area given the specific circumstances applying there. This measure will make available a financial contribution to cover losses or damage sustained due to flooding. Support under the measure will apply to losses of livestock, the loss of conserved fodder (hay or silage) and as a contribution towards the clean-up cost of agricultural lands, including repair to fences, damaged by debris washed up by the floods. Only losses not covered by insurance will be eligible for consideration. The measure builds on the availability of support through the Animal Welfare Helpline and through the advisory assistance made available by Teagasc in the region.

No payments in respect of these losses are being made under the Rural Development Programme. However, I can assure farmers whose land has been flooded and who are concerned about possible consequences in terms of eligibility for payments that a practical approach will be taken in terms of dealing with people who have been victims of these events which were completely outside of their control. One early example of this is that I have approved an extension to the deadline for planting catch crops under the GLAS scheme given the delayed harvest in some areas. My Department is actively working towards making timely payments under the RDP schemes in line with regulatory requirements and subject to all administrative and other checks being cleared.

Coillte Teoranta Lands

1323. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the sale of land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37867/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their forest estate and land transactions, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that their legal team have supplied a signed and sealed Deed of Rectification.

Animal Disease Controls

1324. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps taken to eliminate hoof wall separation disease in Connemara ponies; the reason testing has not been made mandatory for all ponies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37880/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Hoof Wall Separation Disease (HWSD) is caused by a genetic defect that appears to occur only in the Connemara pony breed and the carrier frequency has been estimated to be about 14.8%. For a foal to be affected by the disease both sire and dam must be carriers.

The Connemara Pony Breeders Society (CPBS) has been approved by my Department to maintain the Studbook for Connemara Ponies and in this regard operate a breeding programme for the breed.

Research carried out by the Connemara Pony Breeders Society in conjunction with Weath-

erbys has enabled them to test for the presence of the HWSD gene. My Department has allocated funding to the Connemara Pony Breeders Society under the Equine Infrastructures Scheme since 2015 to facilitate this project.

The results from this project will enable the Society to plan for the future and implement a strategy to manage this genetic defect identifying potential carriers. This should decrease the incidence of the disease with a view to eliminating it for the Connemara pony population.

Regarding the mandatory testing of all ponies for entry into the studbook, European Union Commission Decision 96/78/EC sets out the criteria for entry into the main section of the studbook. This criteria prevents the CPBS from imposing a mandatory requirement for animals to be tested for HWSD in order to enter the studbook.

Hazardous Waste Sites

1325. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the status of the cleanup of the former Irish Steel site in Haulbowline, County Cork. [37887/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The remediation of the area of Haulbowline Island known as the East Tip forms part of Ireland's Programme of Measures to address the judgment in April 2005 of the European Court of Justice against Ireland in Case C494/01.

Cork County Council, acting as agents on my behalf, have been engaged in a range of preparatory works at Haulbowline since 2012 including extensive site exploration works, road and bridge repair and securing the appropriate planning and licencing permits.

Following a comprehensive tendering process, the preferred tenderer for the primary East Tip works was identified by Cork County Council and the contract signed on 10 July last. The works programme includes marine elements to prevent tidal incursions to the site, access and infrastructure works and the capping of waste materials to render the site safe, stable and suitable for future uses. I expect significant construction activity to commence on site over the coming weeks and for remediation works on the East Tip to be largely complete by late 2018.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

1326. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37932/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application to join the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) 2015-2020 on 18 May 2015.

The BDGP was approved as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme under article 28 of EU Regulation 1305/2013. Under that approval, and the Terms and Conditions governing the BDGP, the reference year was set as 2014. However, in certain limited circumstances, where 2014 was not a typical year e.g. animal disease, participants could request to use 2015 as an alternative reference year.

Having examined the number of suckler cows in the herd between 2011 and 2014, the number of suckler cows did not exceed 4 and so while the number of cows in the herd may have

increased recently there is no basis on which the reference year can be changed.

Noxious Weeds

1327. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations regarding ragwort; and his plans to address its renewed growth. [37933/17]

1334. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the responsibilities of landowners regarding noxious weeds on their property; the way in which laws regarding this issue are enforced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38237/17]

1335. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the responsibility of local authorities for the management of noxious weeds on public ground and roadsides; the way in which the rules in this regard are monitored and enforced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38254/17]

1367. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions that have been taken to ensure compliance with the noxious weeds legislation with reference to the spread of ragwort and Japanese knotweed; the number of prosecutions pending; the number of these that have been taken against public bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38477/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1327, 1334, 1335 and 1367 together.

My Department actively seeks to enforce the provisions of the 1936 Noxious Weeds Act by issuing “Notices to Destroy” in all instances where it becomes aware of the presence of noxious weeds.

Some 21 such notices were issued in 2016 with a further 18 having been issued to date in 2017. These notices are issued as a result of inspections carried out by Department Field Officers or on receipt of reports made by the public. Follow-up action may be undertaken by Departmental officials with the land owner to ensure that the notifications are acted upon and that the particular weeds have been dealt with as stipulated in the Notice to Destroy.

My Department continues to engage with all County Councils, Local Authorities and the National Roads Authority to ensure a consistent programme of treatment and disposal of such weeds on an ongoing basis. In this regard, my Department was in contact with each of the County and Local Authorities in the Country earlier this year emphasising their statutory obligation and the importance of implementing measures for the treatment and safe disposal of ragwort in order to eliminate and prevent the spread of same.

On the issue of any impact of an infestation of ragwort on farmers’ area-based schemes payments, farmers are obliged to keep their lands free from noxious weeds under the cross-compliance measures set down for farming practices. Failure to do so can result in the application of a reduction of their payment entitlement. EU Regulations governing the various area-based Direct Payments Schemes, e.g. BPS, Greening, and Rural Development measures, call for applicants to comply with Cross-Compliance requirements relating to the 13 Statutory Managements Requirements (SMRs) and the 7 Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) standards. GAEC Standard 7 requires applicants to ensure that they take appropriate measures to prevent the encroachment/proliferation of noxious weeds/invasive plant species onto land. In 2016, a total of 89 sanctions were applied which resulted in 65 penalties.

While the Act makes provision for taking prosecutions against offenders, this measure has not been resorted to in recent years. Modern farming has reached a level of specialisation and intensification which makes weed control a fundamental and automatic practice. However, the prevalence of ragwort found along the margins of roadways and in locations such as derelict sites regrettably appears to have increased.

With regard to the issue of Japanese Knotweed, this plant species is categorised as an invasive species covered by SI 477 of 2011 and is administered by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and of which I have no function.

TAMS Payments

1328. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a TAMS grant payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37974/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved for a grant under the Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme of TAMS II in June 2016. A query letter issued to the applicant in June 2017 in relation to the claim submitted for payment. When the issues raised are responded to by the applicant, processing of the file can resume.

Brexit Staff

1329. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37984/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Unit within its EU & International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a new Brexit & International Trade Division, headed by a full-time Head of Division at Principal Officer level. Brexit will also be a substantial component of the work of the Assistant Secretary General to whom this Principal Officer reports, in addition to EU and international trade matters.

The staff and administrative costs associated with the activities of the unit are paid from the Department's Administrative Budget as required.

Brexit Staff

1330. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38000/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Co-ordination Unit within its EU & International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a new Brexit & International Trade Division. It comprises eight staff work-

ing full-time on the co-ordination of Brexit issues, including a full-time Head of Division, who in turn reports to an Assistant Secretary General deeply engaged in Brexit issues in addition to discharging other responsibilities. Its work is complementary to that of the Market Access Unit and that of other divisions in the department dealing with trade related issues.

The Unit co-ordinates the ongoing analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of 16 people drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). It also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach.

In overall terms, my Department is continuing to monitor the future workforce needs of both the Department and the Brexit Unit, and will be keeping resource allocations under close review as the negotiations proceed.

Departmental Expenditure

1331. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38016/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is responsible for the six Fishery Harbour Centres located at Howth, Dunmore East, Castletownbere, Dingle, Ros an Mhíl and Killybegs. This Department is also responsible for North Harbour at Cape Clear Island and for maintaining a range of piers, lights and beacons around the coast in accordance with the 1902 ex-congested Districts Board Piers, Lights and Beacons Act. The Fishery Harbour & Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme which the Department administers on an annual basis provides for works relating to the maintenance and development of the above located harbour infrastructure.

From January 2016 to August 2017 the Department has invested €16.4m in capital developments on this marine infrastructure. See the following table for details.

YEAR	2016	2017 to date	Total
EXPENDITURE €m	12.3	4.1	16.4

Capital works and works related services, are generally commissioned by means of an open competitive tendering process achieving best value for money based on prevailing market rates.

Other construction related services and materials are acquired having first considered what is available under the Office of Government Procurement Framework.

My Department is informed in its management functions by the relevant bodies who monitor inflationary impacts on construction projects.

Public Services Card

1332. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he,

or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department, plan to make services or payments dependant on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependant on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38140/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Access to the full range of the Department's online services including applications for EU farm payments, forestry, animal identification and movement, and financial self-services, is currently available through the Agfood.ie web portal where there is detailed information on how to apply for these services. The public services card is not required to access EU farm payments.

GLAS Payments

1333. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38156/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a GLAS 2 application and following the initial checks the Wild Bird Cover action did not meet the minimum area requirement resulting in the application not being approved as the minimum score of 16.3 was not achieved on the remaining actions.

The person named appealed this decision to the Agricultural Appeals Office and the appeal was allowed.

Department officials are actively working to progress the application on the online system and carrying out the necessary checks with a view to approving the person named into the scheme.

Questions Nos. 1334 and 1335 answered with Question No. 1327.

Legislative Measures

1336. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has conducted an assessment on the impact of the proposed restrictions on advertising, labelling and promotions contained in the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015 on the sustainability of new entrant and small rural Irish whiskey and Irish gin distillers and on competition and investment generally in the Irish whiskey and spirits industry, with particular reference to protecting ongoing export growth in line with Food Wise 2025; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38325/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015 comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Health. My Department has not carried out an assessment of the impact of the proposals in the Bill relating to advertising, labelling and promotion.

My Department works with Bord Bia, trade associations and distillers on developing markets for Irish spirit drinks and with Enterprise Ireland on supports for companies with ambitions for export growth.

Harbours and Piers

1337. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason camper vans are prohibited from the middle pier in Howth harbour, Dublin; his views on whether this will adversely affect tourism in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38336/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Pursuant to the Fishery harbour Act 1968 (as amended), my Department has responsibility for the six Fishery Harbour Centres, including Howth. Howth Fishery Harbour Centre is first and foremost a working fishery harbour and its primary objective is to provide for the needs of fishermen and the fishing industry generally. However, Howth is also a very important tourist and leisure destination as you know, and my Department has to be conscious of balancing the various unique features that pertain in Howth Fishery Harbour Centre.

Parking is permitted within the limits of the Howth Fishery Harbour Centre for visitors and recreational users of the harbour, subject to compliance with traffic management markings and procedures. These procedures are in place to ensure the continued safe and efficient operation of the Harbour Centre. Parking of vehicles, plant or equipment that obstruct operations, block walkways or roadways is not permitted.

Agriculture Industry

1338. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he has taken to date to protect the ongoing sustainability of new entrant and small Irish whiskey and Irish gin distillers; his views on the protection, competition and the need for greater investment in the Irish whiskey and spirits industry going forward; his plans in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38354/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Food Wise 2025 strategy identified further potential to increase exports of alcoholic beverages and to diversify markets. Steps for Success 2017, which reported on progress in the past year, included case studies on growth in Irish Whiskey and Irish craft gin, exemplified by the opening of new distilleries and production plants, the launch of new brands and double digit export growth. Irish Whiskey exports reached a value of €500 million in 2016.

My Department has a regulatory role in regard to spirit drinks geographical indications (GI) under European legislation. A dedicated control system for the three protected Irish spirit drinks GIs (Irish Cream, Irish Poitín and Irish Whiskey) has put in place in recent years by my Department acting with the Revenue Commissioners, the FSAI and the HSE. This provides important support and protection for the industry. Only verified distilleries and production plants are eligible to produce the three spirit drinks GIs. Facilities which have been verified are listed on my Department's website. My officials are working on an official list of brands to further protect those investing in the spirits industry. They also have regular contact with trade bodies including the Irish Whiskey Association (IWA) and the Irish Spirits Association (ISA) as well as individual companies and brand owners.

The state agencies including Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland offer promotional, marketing and investment assistance to companies, including new entrants to the spirits industry, to help them to grow and to diversify markets.

In relation to Brexit, in particular, I hosted a sectoral dialogue meeting in May for all those working in the alcohol and beverage sector.

Departmental Bodies

1339. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the annual percentage of staff of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies under the remit of his Department who were women, in each of the years from 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38355/17]

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

Departmental Staff

1340. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the annual percentage of public service staff under the remit of his Department who were women, in each of the years from 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38378/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Please see the percentage of female staff members in my Department (by Head Count) for each of the years requested:

Year	Female
2010	46.56%
2011	46.78%
2012	46.71%
2013	45.99%
2014	45.76%
2015	45.83%
2016	45.83%
End June 2017	46.26%

Departmental Staff

1341. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who will comprise the recently announced high level market access committee in his Department; the number of civil servants who will be allocated to work exclusively on this committee; the number of such civil servants who work on market access exclusively for beef, dairy, lamb, pigmeat and poultry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38450/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Regarding the high level market access committee, no civil servants will work exclusively on the committee. Rather they will combine it with other roles they fulfil within the Department. The committee is chaired at Assistant Secretary level.

A market access unit has been in existence within my Department for a number of years and that unit is working exclusively on meat market access issues for beef, lamb, pigmeat and poultry. Its staffing complement has recently increased and the number of people now working in the unit is 7, comprising an Assistant Principal Officer, an Administrative Officer, A Higher

Executive Officer, 2 Executive Officers and 2 Clerical Officers.

In addition a veterinary unit with a dedicated international markets focus is currently being established. It is anticipated that this unit will have six staff members.

I am conscious of the need to have access to alternative markets for the Irish meat sector as we approach a period of uncertainty regarding our main export market in Great Britain and the redoubling of our efforts on the third country market access front reflects this concern.

Export Controls

1342. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the review of existing export markets in which conditions of certification present barriers to trade or additional costs for exporters will be completed. [38451/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A desk review of the conditions applying to the export of meat to the various third country export markets has been carried out by the market access unit. Those conditions which went beyond the normal conditions which apply in the European Union were highlighted.

Following this exercise, my Department successfully negotiated with the competent authority in a number of third countries the removal of barriers.

For example, the requirement to test cattle aged over 72 months for BSE when supplying the South African market was identified as a barrier. The removal of this condition was successfully negotiated with the South African authorities.

In another case, the Singaporean authorities agreed to accept deboned beef from animals of all ages and bone-in beef from animals aged less than thirty months. Previously they would only accept deboned beef from animals aged less than thirty months.

This review of technical barriers is an ongoing process which includes consultation with industry.

My Department's aim is to negotiate veterinary health conditions for the export of meat and meat products to third countries that do not place an unacceptable high burden on Irish meat exporters.

Departmental Websites

1343. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the new dedicated portal website, which will bring together in one location the full range of open markets and products and the relevant conditions certification in a user-friendly manner, for exporters will be live in 2017. [38452/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The portal website has been developed and content is currently being populated on the site. The site will go live as soon as possible when the full range of content has been added to the site.

Exports Data

1344. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the exports of beef, lamb, pigmeat and dairy to the USA to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38453/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures indicate that by the end of June 2017 our overall agrifood exports to the USA were some €520 million, a significant increase from €430 million, found during the same period in 2016. Beverages account for almost half the agrifood exports to the USA.

Dairy exports to the USA in the first half of the year were over 16,400 tonnes (€83.3 million) an increase of 26% on the same period in 2016. Pigmeat exports accounted for €9.1 million (2,273 tonnes) in the first half of 2017.

The latest figures from the United States Department of Agriculture show exports of beef from Ireland to the US amounting to 1,430 tonnes up to and including week 34 of 2017 (week ending 26 August 2017). Exports of beef are running 13% behind last year's level. There were no exports of lamb from Ireland to the US as we do not have sheepmeat access yet.

One of the main factors affecting trade is currency fluctuations and 2017 has seen an unfavourable movement in the exchange rate between the US dollar and the euro.

Export Controls

1345. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress on gaining access for Irish beef, lamb and pigmeat products to the United States; the outstanding stages in the approval process; and the approximate timeframe for all stages to be completed for full access to be granted. [38454/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland was the first EU Member State to be granted beef market access to the USA in 2015. A total of 10 Irish plants have been approved for the export of raw intact beef to the US, of which 2 are also approved for beef intended for grinding (BIFG). This enhances our ability to export beef to the US, where a very significant demand exists for beef that will be minced and turned into beef burgers.

Sheepmeat exports from the EU to the US are banned due to the presence of TSE in certain EU MS. Access to the USA will depend on the USA lifting its TSE ban on EU sheepmeat. The final TSE rule has not been published as yet but my Department and I have raised this issue with the USDA on a number of occasions including as part of the Trade Mission in June this year. The sheepmeat questionnaire (SRT) was completed by my Department and submitted during August 2016 in preparation for the lifting of the ban.

Sheepmeat access to the USA is a high priority for my Department and the sheepmeat industry. An encouraging development is that the Food Safety Inspection Service/USDA inspection visit to Ireland in September 2017 will include visits to Irish sheepmeat plants. However, timelines for access are not possible to predict.

Ireland has enjoyed uninterrupted access to the US market for raw pork since the end of the FMD outbreak in 2001. A total of 3 plants are approved for the export of raw pork to the US. We previously also had access for treated or processed pork products. However, this access lapsed earlier this year as no exports had taken place within the preceding three year period.

Exports Data

1346. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the manufactured beef products exported to the United States on an annual basis in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, by volume and value, in tabular form. [38455/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no manufactured beef products exported from Ireland to the USA as we do not have access for manufactured beef. Ireland enjoys access to the US market in respect of raw intact beef and beef intended for grinding (BIFG) where the plant of origin has the necessary approval. BIFG, also known as manufacturing beef, may go on to be assimilated into a manufactured beef product (e.g. beef burgers) once it is imported into the US but it is not exported as such a product. All meat plants approved for the export of beef are subject to audit by the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), a branch of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

GLAS Data

1347. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 who have received the 15% of their total 2016 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons who have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 15% portion of the 2016 payment; the number of GLAS recipients who have yet to receive this portion of payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38457/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of participants who have received their 15% balancing payment and who have been cleared for payment is set out in tabular form.

All GLAS participants must submit a nutrient management plan (NMP) before their balancing payment can be released and to date 25,820 have complied with this requirement.

Balancing payments continue to be made on an on-going basis when the NMP is submitted.

County	No. of applicants paid to date	No. of applicants cleared for payment
Carlow	272	0
Cavan	1028	7
Clare	1649	31
Cork	2338	14
Donegal	2211	10
Dublin	48	1
Galway	3064	48
Kerry	1411	33
Kildare	222	1
Kilkenny	394	11
Laois	421	2
Leitrim	1004	8
Limerick	740	21
Longford	604	12

County	No. of applicants paid to date	No. of applicants cleared for payment
Louth	119	1
Mayo	2754	41
Meath	357	5
Monaghan	538	8
Offaly	426	11
Roscommon	1446	22
Sligo	778	11
Tipperary	777	20
Waterford	295	1
Westmeath	529	5
Wexford	642	9
Wicklow	273	0
Total	24340	333

Sheep Welfare Scheme Data

1348. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons active in the sheep welfare scheme; and the amount of expenditure drawn down in 2017 from the scheme. [38458/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A total of 22,174 applications were received under the 2017 Sheep Welfare Scheme.

The payment is set at a rate of €10 per eligible breeding ewe. Payments are due to commence later this year. Therefore no expenditure has been drawn down to date.

Agriculture Scheme Data

1349. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 975, 976 and 978 of 13 July 2017, if the information requested been compiled. [38459/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I appreciate that the Deputy has been waiting for this information, however the significant range of data requested across a 7 year period is not readily available, as previously advised.

Officials in my Department will have a large proportion of the data issued to the Deputy by the end of this week, with any outstanding data issuing as soon as possible thereafter.

TAMS Data

1350. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme 2 by county; the number of approved applications by county; the number of payment claims logged by county; the number of payment claims that have been approved for payment by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38460/17]

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

Approvals and payments continue on an on-going basis for the TAMS II Schemes.

County	Applications Received	Approved	Claim Lodged	Approved For Payment
Carlow	207	173	18	14
Cavan	516	381	75	42
Clare	403	356	89	81
Cork	2050	1713	376	241
Donegal	722	524	50	41
Dublin	76	59	5	2
Galway	974	760	148	116
Kerry	961	758	159	124
Kildare	249	188	32	19
Kilkenny	695	568	136	111
Laois	392	324	66	54
Leitrim	203	152	32	21
Limerick	663	557	125	86
Longford	193	144	25	20
Louth	167	133	15	7
Mayo	529	410	66	52
Meath	474	370	51	38
Monaghan	460	342	64	39
Offaly	312	255	46	26
Roscommon	518	416	60	47
Sligo	192	147	29	20
Tipperary	1121	939	257	223
Waterford	445	379	78	59
Westmeath	327	271	49	36
Wexford	684	568	88	57
Wicklow	232	177	21	16
Totals	13765	11064	2160	1592

Flood Relief Schemes

1351. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to re-open the emergency flood relief scheme for County Donegal farmers in view of the severe damage caused by flooding; and if not, the reason therefor. [38461/17]

1352. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to re-open the emergency fodder aid scheme for County Donegal farmers in view of the severe damage caused by flooding; and if not, the reason therefor. [38462/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1351 and 1352 together.

In the aftermath of the sudden flooding in North East Donegal last month, I visited the af-

affected area with my colleague Minister Joe McHugh where I witnessed first-hand some of the difficulties farmers faced as a consequence of the unprecedented rainfall. I committed to supporting those farmers most directly affected and my Department was actively involved in the immediate cross-Government response.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that following positive discussions at Cabinet last Wednesday, 6 September, I am launching a targeted support measure to provide assistance to farmers in North East Donegal around the Inishowen Peninsula who bore the brunt of the effects of the brief but severe flooding last month.

Support under this measure will apply to losses of livestock, the loss of conserved fodder (hay or silage) and as a contribution towards the clean-up cost of agricultural lands, including repair to fences, damaged by debris washed up by the floods. This initiative builds on the availability of support through the Animal Welfare Helpline and through the advisory assistance Teagasc made available to farmers in the area.

The measure will be subject to the provisions of EU de minimis state aid rules in the agriculture sector and only losses not covered by insurance will be eligible for consideration.

Rural Development Programme

1353. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 contains references or measures under investments for the restoration of agricultural land and production potential damaged by natural disasters, adverse climatic events and catastrophic events as provided under Article 18(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) No. 1305/2013; if investments for the restoration of agricultural land and production potential damaged by severe flooding can be funded under RDP 2014-2020; and if an amendment would be necessary to same. [38463/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme does not contain a measure for restoring agricultural production potential damaged by natural disasters and introduction of appropriate prevention. Following detailed analysis and public consultation, it was concluded that because of its geographic position Ireland is not generally prone to suffering from natural disasters and that pre-existing nationally funded measures are considered to be sufficient to address any possibilities.

That is not to say that we do not suffer from adverse climatic events, as evidenced by the recent freak flooding in North Donegal, but that is being dealt with outside of the RDP through a nationally funded measure which I introduced last week. An amendment to the RDP would be required if funding were to be provided under Article 18(1)b of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 which would take considerable time to complete.

EU Funding

1354. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Government has made an application to the European Union Solidarity Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to support the reconstruction of regions affected by major natural disasters, in view of the severe damage cause by flooding in County Donegal. [38464/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In the aftermath of the sudden flooding in North East Donegal last month, I visited the affected area with my colleague Minister Joe McHugh where I witnessed first-hand some of the difficulties farmers faced as a consequence of the unprecedented rainfall. I committed to supporting those farmers most directly affected and my Department was actively involved in the immediate cross-Government response. In regard to EU support funds I understand from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform that the objective of the European Regional Development Fund is to support economic and territorial cohesion. It is not primarily available to assist reconstruction after natural disasters. It is not possible to make any payments to individual farms from this fund.

The European Union Solidarity Fund was established to provide support to authorities at the national or regional level to deal with a major disaster and is also subject to economic criteria for qualification. I am passing your enquiry on this matter to my colleague Eoghan Murphy T.D. Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government for consideration.

The Deputy will be aware that I have launched a targeted support measure to provide assistance to farmers in North East Donegal around the Inishowen Peninsula who bore the brunt of the effects of the brief but severe flooding last month. Assistance under this measure will be provided in accordance with Commission Regulation (EU) No 1408/2013 (de minimis aid in the agriculture sector)

Support under this measure will apply to losses of livestock, the loss of conserved fodder (hay or silage) and as a contribution towards the clean-up cost of agricultural lands, including repair to fences, damaged by debris washed up by the floods. This initiative builds on the availability of support through the Animal Welfare Helpline and through the advisory assistance Teagasc made available to farmers in the area.

This is the only measure of support available to my Department to provide assistance to farmers experiencing agricultural losses as a result of flooding.

Rural Development Programme

1355. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 contains references or measures under biogas production and anaerobic digestion (details supplied); and if an amendment is necessary to same to enable the State to create such a scheme under these measures. [38465/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will deliver funding of some €4 billion to the agricultural sector and rural areas generally over the lifetime of the Programme. The Programme's content and design was formulated in light of previous experience and performance and reflects the outcome of extensive stakeholder consultation and does not include support for biogas production or anaerobic digestors on farms.

Under the Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 a Pilot Waste Processing Facilities Scheme provided funding of €4 million in order to grant-aid the installation of anaerobic digestors on ten Irish farms (i.e. 10 x €400,000). Two projects were completed and a further two have been given extensions to undertake the work by the end of 2017 and mid 2018 respectively. Both projects will be nationally funded if completed.

On the broader issue of supporting renewable energy, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment leads in terms of Ireland's renewable energy policy and over-

sees the Renewable Electricity Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) schemes. These Schemes are the principal means of supporting renewable electricity generators for renewable energy exported to the grid. The schemes operate by guaranteeing a minimum price for renewable energy generation over a 15 year period. The technologies supported include onshore wind energy, hydroelectricity, landfill gas, waste-to-energy and biomass technologies, including anaerobic digestion. Electricity and heat produced from anaerobic digestion (AD) are supported under the REFIT 3 scheme.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is currently examining the design and cost of introducing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) to encourage the development of Ireland's abundant and indigenous renewable energy resources. This scheme will examine the economic viability of supporting a range of new renewable energy technologies in Ireland - including Anaerobic Digestion - and will help to further reduce energy-related emissions. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply.

A public consultation on the design principles of the proposed new RESS was launched on 4 September and submissions are invited from the public. All submissions will be considered and following on from this final public consultation, a design proposal will be brought to Government for approval. Full details of the consultation are available on the Department's website at: www.dccae.gov.ie

Departmental Agencies Data

1356. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the specific targets set for agencies under his auspices in view of recent comments by the Taoiseach to double the Team Ireland footprint overseas by 2025. [38466/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department and its agencies already have a strong global footprint which is primarily aimed at facilitating growth in the trade of agri-food products with countries around the world.

For example, my Department maintains a network of agriculture attache's both within the EU, but also increasingly in countries with whom we are seeking to further develop our trading links, such as the United States of America, the Gulf Region and China. We also work closely with Bord Bia in developing international markets through its network of offices around the world, which it has recently expanded to include a presence in Singapore and in Warsaw. We work very effectively together, and with the relevant authorities, in progressing market access issues and in the organisation of Trade Missions aimed at promoting and supporting the export of Irish agri-food products. Food Wise 2025, which outlines a vision for the development of the agri food sector, proposes increasing the value of exports in these sectors to 19 billion by 2025.

This is an ongoing process, made all the more relevant by the new challenges that the UK decision to leave the EU has created. Accordingly, I and my Department keep our international presence and activities under constant review with a view to maximising their contribution to the development of the Irish agri-food sector.

I therefore look forward to working closely with the Taoiseach and my Government colleagues in developing plans to double Ireland's footprint overseas, and to availing of this opportunity to make our work in this area more effective.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Review

1357. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the latest timeframe for the ANC review at EU level; the timeframe for maps to be produced for the review; the deadline by which member states will have to submit final maps to the European Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38467/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Rural Development Regulation each Member State (MS) must designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. The ANC scheme replaces the previous Disadvantaged Areas Scheme / Less Favoured Areas Scheme. The designation of eligible areas under these schemes to date has been based on a range of socio-economic factors. From 2018 eligible areas must instead be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria. As part of the discussion on amendments to Regulations at EU level, a proposal has been adopted to extend the 2018 deadline for the completion of this work on an optional basis. This proposal is currently passing through the relevant approval process at EU level, along with a number of other regulatory changes in what is referred to as the ‘omnibus proposal’.

Public Service Cards

1358. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farmers will require public services cards to access EU farm payments. [38468/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Access to the full range of the Department’s online services including applications for EU farm payments, forestry, animal identification and movement, and financial self-services, is currently available through the Agfood.ie web portal where there is detailed information on how to apply for these services. The public services card is not required to access EU farm payments.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

1359. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the CAP market support measures available at EU level for producers under Article 221 of CAP Regulation Number 1308/2013. [38469/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Article 221 of CAP Regulation No 1308/2013 provides for the Commission to adopt implementing acts to introduce necessary and emergency measures to resolve specific problems. However, these emergency measures under Article 221 will only be adopted by the Commission in the event that required emergency measures under Articles 219 (measures against market disturbance) or 220 (measures concerning animal diseases and loss of consumer confidence due to public, animal or plant health risks) cannot be adopted.

Emergency measures were introduced by the Commission in accordance with Articles 219 and 220 of 1308/2013 in recent years in direct response to the market difficulties being experienced by farmers and producers during this time. Such measures included exceptional adjustment aid to milk producers and farmers in other livestock sectors, with €350 million in emergency funding allocated to Member States. Ireland’s allocation of €11.1 million from this fund (topped up by 100% national funding) was used to leverage a greater fund of €150 million to provide low-cost loans to the livestock and tillage sectors.

To date, emergency measures in accordance with Article 221 of Regulation 1308/2013 have not been introduced by the European Commission. This does not however, prejudice the use of this article in the future should the need arise.

Brexit Negotiations

1360. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he or his Government colleagues requested an increase in State aid de minimis limits at EU level to target support for exposed sectors arising from the continued depreciation of the value of sterling against the euro. [38470/17]

1386. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will outline each specific Council of EU agriculture Ministers meeting at which he made the case for the need of a revision of state aid rules for the Irish agrifood sector during the UK's two-year exit phase from the EU and subsequent transition phase; the date of each such meeting at which this was raised since he took office, in tabular form; the progress that has been made at EU level to increase current state aid thresholds to support agrifood enterprises from a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38602/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1360 and 1386 together.

Regarding the Agriculture De Minimis Regulation (1408/2013), the question of greater flexibility of the State Aid rules and increasing the individual de minimis thresholds has been raised at the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 14 March 2016, 11 April 2016 and 17 May 2016 as a means to address the challenges facing the farming sector. Regarding the Council of Agriculture Ministers, on 14 March 2016, a 10 point plan, setting out proposed measures, that were practical, easily implemented and responded to the pressures on farmers and primary producers in an appropriate and proportionate way, was proposed. Among the measures proposed, was greater flexibility in the State Aid rules, with a modest increase in the *de minimis* limit from €15,000 per farmer over three years, up to €20,000 per farmer over three years.

Regarding Brexit, I and my Department officials are very aware of the difficulties being experienced across the agrifood sector and are continually working on developing solutions to help farmers address these difficulties. I recently met with Commissioner Hogan to express my concerns regarding the difficulties for Irish farmers and I will be making proposals to the Commission in this regard.

In addition, my Department officials are working closely with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in considering appropriate measures for the wider agri-food sector.

GLAS Data

1361. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons enrolled in GLAS 1 and 2 who have submitted their nutrient management plans to date; and the number who have not submitted their nutrient management plans to date, by county, in tabular form. [38471/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

-	GLAS 1			GLAS 2		
	COUNTY	Active	NMP	No NMP	Active	NMP
Carlow	280	215	65	128	89	39
Cavan	909	750	159	432	343	89
Clare	1,620	1,260	360	688	466	222
Cork	2,171	1,754	417	1,009	727	282
Donegal	1,948	1,622	326	1,006	677	329
Dublin	64	43	21	17	7	10
Galway	3,085	2,372	713	1,311	893	418
Kerry	1,770	1,023	747	872	432	440
Kildare	249	202	47	80	48	32
Kilkenny	433	296	137	208	133	75
Laois	372	326	46	195	131	64
Leitrim	1,022	781	241	418	268	150
Limerick	1,057	613	444	302	163	139
Longford	512	387	125	346	249	97
Louth	150	111	39	79	21	58
Mayo	2,557	2,154	403	1,329	837	492
Meath	424	248	176	204	125	79
Monaghan	580	457	123	146	109	37
Offaly	481	309	172	280	142	138
Roscom- mon	1,529	1,157	372	553	365	188
Sligo	943	665	278	363	148	215
Tipperary	1,138	597	541	510	219	291
Waterford	365	266	99	132	45	87
Westmeath	648	419	229	263	134	129
Wexford	778	590	188	265	142	123
Wicklow	333	226	107	154	64	90
Totals	25,418	18,843	6,575	11,290	6,977	4,313

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1362. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of knowledge transfer group participants who have completed animal health measures and have not completed animal health measures respectively, by county, in tabular form. [38472/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The following table details the number of Knowledge Transfer participants by county who had completed and not completed Animal Health Measures on closure of Year 1 of the KT Programme at midnight, Wednesday 22nd August. It should be noted that in addition to these figures approximately 20 AHMs were partially completed. The data provided relates to the five sectors to which the AHMs apply (it is not required for KT Tillage groups).

In addition, some further data has been received which will now be reviewed by Department for further processing – for example, some elements were received by email in cases where the person submitting the data may have experienced submission issues etc.

Taking the Animal Health Measures together with the elements of the Farm Improvement Plan the overall position is that some 18,400 KT Participants have either fully or partially submitted the data submission requirements for Year 1 of KT. These participants will now be subject to the standard administrative and verification checks in order to process them for payment, including verification of having attending the required number of Group meetings etc.

County	Complete	Not Undertaken
Carlow	184	39
Cavan	378	52
Clare	431	60
Cork	1,537	262
Donegal	1,260	114
Dublin	22	6
Galway	2,147	353
Kerry	860	86
Kildare	162	38
Kilkenny	526	84
Laois	260	59
Leitrim	389	38
Limerick	703	130
Longford	325	39
Louth	165	38
Mayo	1,758	147
Meath	334	62
Monaghan	471	80
Offaly	277	78
Roscommon	852	83
Sligo	505	39
Tipperary	1,037	256
Waterford	190	31
Westmeath	363	40
Wexford	495	71
Wicklow	218	57
Grand Total	15,849	2,342

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1363. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of knowledge transfer group participants that have and have not respectively completed their farm improvement plans. [38473/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): On closure of Year 1 of the KT Programme at midnight, Wednesday 22 August, 17,690 Farm Improvement Plans had been submitted by the relevant KT Group Facilitator with a further 382 partially completed on the KT system. 991 Farm Improvement Plans have not been undertaken on the KT Farm Improvement Plan online system.

Some further data has been received which will now be reviewed by Department for further

processing - for example, some elements were received by email in cases where the person submitting the data may have experienced submission issues etc.

Taken with completion numbers for the Animal Health Measures the overall position is that some 18,400 KT Participants have either fully or partially submitted the data submission requirements for Year 1 of KT. These participants will now be subject to the standard administrative and verification checks in order to process them for payment, including verification of having attended the required number of Group meetings etc.

Dairy Sector

1364. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps taken to future-proof existing policy to deal with labour shortages in the dairy sector. [38474/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware of the issues facing the entire farming sector, particularly dairy, in relation to the impact of the availability of sufficiently skilled labour. The ambitious growth targets for the sector laid out in Food Harvest 2020(FH2020) and Food Wise 2025 (FW2025) will require the availability of a dynamic and adequately skilled labour force in order to come to fruition. The tightening situation in the dairy sector is of course influenced by the broader economy and the increasing competition for labour from other sectors.

The expansion of the dairy sector, as envisaged in FH2020 and FW2025 is resulting in an increase in the numbers of cows being milked by individual farmers. The general rule is that a single labour unit can handle 80-100 cows effectively. The increase in cow numbers is causing a demand for additional personnel. However the lack of people with the necessary skills to work and manage these dairy farms has the potential to hinder development in the sector.

My Department has formulated a number of responses to this, including the commissioning of Teagasc to conduct research into the factors affecting the labour shortage in the dairy sector in order to inform the development of the necessary interventions. My Department has also conducted workshops with industry stakeholders from which recommendations were made to the High Level Implementation Committee for Food Wise 2025 which are currently being examined.

My Department also co-funds a milking skills training course run by Teagasc and Farm Relief Services aimed at providing the necessary skills to ensure efficient milking on an expanded scale.

Data from Teagasc shows that the number of graduates from Agricultural Colleges actively seeking employment in the dairy industry is lower than might be expected. Teagasc is keeping this issue under continuous review and I intend to have the matter considered by the High Level Implementation Group of Foodwise 2025.

Knowledge Transfer Programme

1365. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of Teagasc-facilitated KT groups in operation under the KTG scheme; and the number of persons who are not Teagasc clients but are in its KT groups and are being charged membership fees by the same organisation. [38475/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The issue raised is an operational matter for Teagasc.

I am advised by Teagasc that there are 700 Teagasc-facilitated KT groups, consisting of 11,000 participants in total. Teagasc further advise that they only facilitate KT discussion groups for clients who have a contract with them.

Rural Development Programme Data

1366. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and percentage of measures in the rural development programme 2014 to 2020 that contain climate reducing measures. [38476/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The methodology for the calculation of support by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for climate change objectives is set down by Article 2 and Annex II of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014.

Based on the European Commission's methodology, Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will provide support of €3.4 billion for climate change objectives.

The €3.4 billion figure is based on the following:

- 40% of the financial allocation to Priority 3(b) supporting farm risk prevention and management under measures 1, 2 and 16 of Ireland's 2014-2020 RDP.

- 100% of the financial allocation to Priority 4 restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture under measures 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16 of Ireland's 2014-2020 RDP.

- 100% of the financial allocation to Priority 5 promoting resource efficient and supporting the shift towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy under measures 1, 2, 4, 10 and 16 of Ireland's 2014-2020 RDP.

- 40% of the financial allocation to Priority 6(b) fostering local development in rural areas under measure 19 of Ireland's 2014-2020 RDP.

- Examples of schemes within the RDP which have a specific climate focus include the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) and the GLAS agri-environment scheme. Both of these schemes combined have a budget of approximately €1.5bn over the lifetime of the RDP and will provide measurable climate related benefits for Ireland and Irish agriculture.

Question No. 1367 answered with Question No. 1327.

EU Investigations

1368. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the latest publication by the EU Commission notice of initiation of a partial interim review of the anti-dumping measures applicable to imports of ammonium nitrate originating in Russia. [38478/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I welcome the European Commission's notice of initiation to conduct a partial interim review of the anti

dumping measures applicable to imports of ammonium nitrate originating in Russia. I have raised the issue of anti dumping duties on imports of fertiliser from Russia a number of times at the Council of Agriculture Ministers, most recently at the meeting of Agriculture Ministers held in Luxembourg in June 2017.

I am acutely aware that fertiliser is a major input cost on farms. Indeed Eurostat estimates that fertiliser is the third most important expenditure item on EU farms, accounting for €19.2 billion of input costs in 2014. In terms of Irish farms, the Central Statistics Office 2016 final estimates of Output, Input and Income in Agriculture identifies fertiliser expenditure at €508 million in 2016.

The anti-dumping duties on Russian fertiliser imports range from €32.83 per tonne to €47.07 per tonne of ammonium nitrate with Nitrogen being the main nutrient used in Ireland relative to Phosphorus or Potassium.

As highlighted, I have raised the issue of anti dumping tariffs on fertiliser imports at Council on a number of occasions, because they impose a significant additional cost on Irish farmers. While the issue has proven quite intractable, because Member States have differing views on the matter, I am pleased that the Commission has announced its intention to conduct this review.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

1369. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of Exchequer funding allocated and expended under the emergency flood relief scheme 2015 to 2016. [38480/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In response to the flooding in December 2015 and January 2016, my Department put in place a range of supports for farmers in the areas most affected. As part of this response, a fund of up to €2 million was allocated to cover the associated expenditure for interventions such as the Emergency Flood Relief Measure, the Fodder Aid Scheme and the Emergency Animal Welfare support. From this allocation, €97,909 was paid to applicants under the Emergency Flood Relief Scheme.

Farm Safety Scheme

1370. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the allocation for farm safety initiatives in each of the years 2011 to 2016 in tabular form. [38486/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine supports the work of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) who have primary responsibility for Health and Safety on farms. As such, any allocations by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) are additional to those spent by the HSA.

The figures given relate to allocations for schemes that include significant farm safety elements.

Year	Allocation
2011	€1.7m
2012	€3.1m

2013	€0.5m
2014	€2.0m
2015	€16.2m
2016	€20.62m

DAFM, in conjunction with the HSA, is focused on changing farmer behaviour in relation to Health and Safety. Research (commissioned by the HSA) has shown that behavioural change is the key to reducing the level of accidents both fatal and non-fatal, on farms. The same research showed that farmers are generally aware of the risks, however, there were problems with farmers implementing basic safety measures.

Bord Bia Expenditure

1371. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the allocation for promoting Irish food abroad by Bord Bia in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and the allocation for 2017 in tabular form. [38487/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides an annual grant to Bord Bia to carry its role to promote, assist and develop the marketing of Irish food, livestock and horticulture at home and abroad; to develop potential markets; to collect market intelligence, provide advice on trends and opportunities, to engage in promotion and quality assurance schemes, and to administer schemes, grants, and other financial facilities including EU funding.

The Estimates for Vote 30 Agriculture, Food and the Marine show expenditure allocations for Bord Bia.

Marketing and Promotional Expenditure

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
24,596	24,529	23,957	25,558	27,288	28,773	36,282

These Programmes together with the Bord Bia Sustainable Beef and Lamb Quality Assurance Scheme, the Food Dudes Healthy Eating Initiative, pay and cost of funding Bord Bia main office and 13 offices abroad are funded by Department grant, statutory levies and industry contributions.

Marketing and promotional activities are reported on in detail in the Bord Bia Annual Reports.

Bord Bia Expenditure

1372. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the allocation for promoting Irish sea food abroad by Bord Bia in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and the allocation for 2017 in tabular form. [38488/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department provides an annual grant to Bord Bia to carry out its role to promote, assist and develop the marketing of Irish food, livestock and horticulture at home and abroad; to develop potential markets; to collect market intelligence, provide advice on trends and opportunities, to engage in promotion and quality assurance schemes, and to administer schemes, grants, and other financial facilities including EU funding. This includes the promotion of Irish seafood exports.

The Estimates for Vote 30 Agriculture, Food and the Marine show expenditure allocations for Bord Bia. Marketing and promotional activities are reported on in detail in the Bord Bia Annual Reports.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
€000	24,596	24,529	23,957	25,558	27,288	28,773	36,282

In relation to the years 2016 and 2017, additional funding above the Vote 30 expenditure was provided by my Department under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme 2014-2020. This was co-funded by the Exchequer and EU.

Year	EMFF Funding €	
2016	833,000	Actual expenditure
2017	833,000	Allocation

Sheep Welfare Scheme Data

1373. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated cost of an enhanced sheep welfare scheme that would include additional environmental and climate change measures resulting in an increased payment of €5 per ewe in circumstances in which such actions were undertaken. [38489/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sheep Welfare Scheme was introduced under the Rural Development Program to contribute to the continued development of animal and health welfare in the sheep sector. The current Sheep Welfare Scheme is based on a menu of actions for farmers where a farmer picks two actions according to their flock and they can receive payment of €10 per breeding ewe.

To introduce new actions and increase payments by €5 per ewe would thus increase the annual cost of the scheme by 50%. Given the number of eligible ewes currently in the scheme, the estimated yearly cost of a scheme with such new measures would be €30 million.

Under the Rural Development Programme payments across schemes are made in recognition of income foregone and costs incurred in undertaking the agreed actions and the payments are agreed with the EU Commission on the basis of costings on this basis. Thus, any such new actions and costs would require the agreement of the EU Commission via the formal RDP amendment process.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

1374. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated cost of increasing funding for the beef data genomics programme to allocate an additional €10, €20, €30, €40 and €50 per suckler cow. [38490/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The BDGP is the main support for the suckler sector and provides farmers with some €300 million of funding over the next six years. I will support this programme through the lifetime of the current RDP. However, any increase in the payment under the BDGP would require approval from the EU Commission.

The estimated cost of funding the BDGP to allocate monies per suckler cow as requested are outlined based on current reference number of 545,469 cows in BDGP I and BDGP II is as

follows:

€10 = €5,454,690

€20 = €10,909,380

€30 = €16,364,070

€40 = €21,818,760

€50 = € 27,273,450

This would be very difficult in the context of an innovative scheme which has undergone an approval process only recently. Even if such approval was forthcoming, it would require farmers to undertake additional actions to justify any additional payment, making the scheme more complex and compliance more difficult.

On April 13, I announced that the BDGP will be reopened to beef suckler farmers who are not already part of the scheme. This scheme (BDGP II) will provide for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability.

Payment rates and actions for participants in BDGP II will be the same as those in the original scheme, with the exception that the training and carbon navigator actions must be completed by 31st October 2017.

Aquaculture Data

1375. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost of the implementation of recommendation ten of the independent aquaculture licence review report. [38491/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently in the process of preparing an Implementation/Prioritisation Plan in respect of the recommendations set out in the Review of the Aquaculture Licensing Process. Pending completion of this process it is not possible to quantify the resources necessary for implementation.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

1376. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated cost of establishing and running a new department within the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission that would perform the function of a regulator to deal with allegations of price fixing in the sale of meat and other agricultural produce (details supplied). [38493/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission is within the remit of the Department of Business, Jobs and Innovation, which has indicated that any information on allegations of price fixing should be referred directly to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, which is the independent statutory authority responsible for the enforcement of national and European competition law in the State.

Common Agricultural Policy Subsidies

1377. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the safeguards he envisages being put in place to maintain Common Agricultural Policy payments to persons when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38516/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I support the retention of a strong and well funded CAP and my position on this matter has been articulated at official and political level and is well understood in other Member States and in the European Commission. I will continue to work hard with my European colleagues to ensure that the CAP receives the maximum level of available funding post 2020. As regards the UK's departure from the EU in March 2019, when the two year negotiating period expires, it is important to note that the amount of CAP funding per Member State under Pillar 1, direct payments, and Pillar 2, rural development, is fixed until 2020 in Regulations of the Council and European Parliament.

Animal Welfare

1378. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cause of deaths of three swans recently on the river Barrow at Bagenalstown, County Carlow, based on the post mortem examination results. [38524/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An adult swan taken from the river Barrow which was in a good state of preservation was the subject of a post mortem investigation by Kilkenny Regional Veterinary Laboratory. While findings as to the cause of death were inconclusive, Avian flu and poisoning were investigated and ruled out. There was evidence of parasitism in the swan submitted which may have contributed to death.

TAMS Payments

1379. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a targeted agricultural modernisation scheme payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38541/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question submitted an application under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II on 8 June 2017. A letter of approval issued to the applicant on the 7th of September 2017. No claim for payment has been received as yet.

Health and Safety Regulations

1380. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the cost of the health and safety inspection for privately owned sprayers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38544/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive establishes a framework for community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides. It sets minimum rules for the use of pesticides in the Community,

so as to reduce the risks to human health and the environment and also promotes the use of integrated pest management.

Implementation of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive relies heavily on both the training of the various people involved at all levels of the industry, and also on the testing programme that has been introduced for all pesticide application equipment.

The need for appropriate training and the requirement for the testing of all pesticide application equipment must be viewed in the context of protecting both human health (operators, bystanders and consumers) and the environment (in particular, by maintaining the high quality of one of our most valuable resources, our water).

The testing of pesticide application equipment must be carried out by a trained and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine-registered Equipment Inspector. The time taken to complete individual inspections will vary depending on the size of the sprayer and therefore farmers who have smaller sprayers will find that this will be reflected in the inspection cost. Each Equipment Inspector operates independently and as a commercial entity, he/she will have his/her own costing structure, my Department does not set any guidelines for charges.

The mandatory maintenance of pesticide application equipment up to the standard required is not only very desirable from a good practice perspective, but it is also very cost effective from the point of view of the farmer by ensuring that the application equipment is applying the correct amount of product and spraying it in an accurate manner.

Estimates Process

1381. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding provided in his Department's Estimates for 2017 for the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme; the expenditure to date; the projected expenditure by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38548/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The funding in this year's estimate for TAMS is €50m. Expenditure to date is €18.3m and since the beginning of August my Department has been making payments at rate of over €1m per week on average. The utilisation of the budget will be dependent on claims submitted by approved applicants and I would urge applicants to submit their payment applications as soon as possible.

Coillte Teoranta Activities

1382. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the role of Coillte in the visitors' centre proposed by south Dublin county council in the Dublin mountains at the Hell Fire Club; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38591/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that the company is facilitating a proposal by South Dublin County Council to develop the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre, a new "gateway" to the Dublin Mountains located at the combined Massy's Wood and Montpelier Hill incorporating the Hell Fire Club site. Coillte advise that these lands are owned by Coillte.

Coillte added that the visitor centre will comprise a dedicated interpretative exhibition and educational facility as well as a café and shop, a rambler's lounge and toilets and that there will be enhanced access to the site with increased car parking and public transport, road improvements and the construction of a new footpath to the site. The company also advise that the proposal will deliver improved quality and quantity of walks and trails for people of all ages and abilities incorporating a tree-top walkway/bridge from Montpelier Hill into Massy's Wood, and provides for the enhancement of the mountain landscape around the visitor centre by replacing large areas of commercial coniferous forest on the eastern slopes of Montpelier Hill with broad-leaved woodland and predominantly indigenous native species.

Teagasc Activities

1383. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding that has been sought and allocated to projects by Teagasc in Dublin south west in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38592/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I can confirm that Teagasc has no research facilities in Dublin South West, has not sought or been allocated any funding in respect of projects in Dublin South West for each of the years mentioned.

Farm Data

1384. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons actively engaged in farming activity in Dublin South West; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38593/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of employment statistics in the State. However, although sectoral figures are available, the QNHS is not sufficiently detailed geographically to provide the number of persons actively engaged in farming activity in Dublin south west.

The CSO's Census 2016 new Geohive Open Data site, however, is a collaboration between that body and Ordnance Survey Ireland, which maps Census of Population 2016 data across a variety of administrative spatial divisions, one of which is electoral constituency.

The data in respect of Dublin South-West indicates that 98 people stated that Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing was their main occupation in April 2016. It should be noted that employment numbers may vary between different data sources, depending on the definition of employment used.

Rural Development Programme

1385. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if it is possible under the rural development programme to have both a suckler cow welfare scheme and an agri-environmental beef scheme in operation. [38601/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Supports for the suckler sector, or indeed any other sector, need to be considered in the overall context of

Ireland's current Rural Development Programme (RDP), taking account of our current budgetary commitments under the programme.

While it may be technically possible to provide assistance to the suckler cow sector through a suckler welfare cow scheme in addition to the agri-environment beef scheme which is currently provided through the BDGP, any such assistance could only be funded on the basis of costs incurred and income foregone, and would have to be funded from within the RDP envelope. It would also require a significant amendment to that RDP and would of course be subject to approval of the European Commission.

The Rural Development Programme already provides significant support for the Suckler sector.

Through Pillar II of the CAP, €300 million of funding over a six year period has been targeted at the Irish suckler herd through the Bovine Data Genomics Programme (BDGP). In response to significant demand, earlier this year I reopened the BDGP programme for new entrants, reflecting the success of this programme, which targets improving both the environmental footprint and also the profitability of the suckler herd through improving the genetic merit in participating herds. The effects of improving the genetic merit of the herds are cumulative and permanent. It is my belief that this type of scheme which sees the application of leading scientific technology applied in a practical manner at farm level is the most appropriate means of providing support to the suckler sector.

While BDGP is the main support, there are a range of further supports provided to suckler farmers under the RDP such as Knowledge Transfer Groups, GLAS, TAMS and supports to ANCs.

Question No. 1386 answered with Question No. 1360.

Brexit Issues

1387. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Ireland has formally applied to the European Commission for a Brexit financial support package for farmers during the UK's two-year exit phase from the EU and subsequent transition phase, including under Article 219 of the Common Market Organisation regulation; if an application has been made to the European Commission for a fund to protect producers impacted by the fall in value of sterling whose produce is exported to the UK market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38603/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very much aware of the significant challenges Brexit poses for Ireland's agri-food sector, in particular our beef and mushroom sectors, both of whom have been recently adversely affected due to the fall in value of sterling and given their high dependence on the UK market.

My Department, in conjunction with the Government, has been actively engaged in developing responses to help mitigate Brexit's more immediate effects, particularly those associated with the sterling/euro exchange rate with many of the responses in place to date emanating from last year's Budget.

In this regard, my Department has submitted a formal request to the European Commission for approval to increase the advance payment rate percentage under Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 to 70% and 85% respectively, as one response to the destabilising impact Brexit is having on farm incomes.

In addition, I am considering a number of other possible measures and have had preliminary discussions with the Commission and a number of other member states in this regard.

Agriculture Schemes

1388. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of money allocated under pillar 1 of the current CAP, 2014 to 2020, to voluntary coupled support; the percentage of funding allocated to voluntary coupled support out of total Irish pillar 1 funding; the amount of the allocated money that has been expended to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38604/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under transitional arrangements in 2014 €24m was paid under the Beef Data Programme and the Grassland Sheep Scheme. The Protein Aid Scheme is the only voluntary coupled scheme operated under the Basic Payment Scheme 2015 - 2020. Funding allocated for this scheme amounts to €3m annually which equates to almost 0.25% of Pillar I funding.

Basic Payment Scheme

1389. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if Ireland has applied to the European Commission to increase the level of advance payments from 16 October 2017 to farmers affected by difficult climatic conditions (details supplied); and if no application has been made, the reason therefore. [38605/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Given the important role that the Basic Payment Scheme plays in supporting the farming sector, I have applied to the EU Commission to increase the level of advance payment to 70%. The normal rate of advance payment allowable under the relevant EU regulations is 50%. I have asked my officials to consult with the EU Commission in relation to the formal approval of this application.

Environmental Schemes

1390. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the new hen harrier scheme; when details of the new scheme will be published and open for applications; when first payments will issue; the budget allocated under the Rural Development Programme, RDP, 2014 to 2020 to this scheme; and the amount of funds expended to date under the relevant RDP measure. [38606/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the outset, I should stress that this is a locally led scheme which is not directly administered by my Department. The design and management of the scheme are primarily matters for the local project team, who will work closely with my Department, as the scheme is rolled out.

The design work for the new scheme has already commenced following the appointment of a locally led Project Team earlier this year. The Project Team has now completed a series of consultation meetings with farmers in the six designated Hen Harrier Special Protected Areas (SPAs), at which more than 500 farmers attended. A seminar for advisors is planned for next week, with training courses planned for December 2017 and May/June 2018. The scientific officers in the team have carried out Hen Harrier monitoring in all SACs and preliminary results from this campaign will be available within weeks. Work is also progressing on detailed Terms

& Conditions for the new Scheme.

I understand that the first farmers will be invited to apply for the Locally-Led Scheme for the Conservation of the Hen Harrier in the latter months of 2017. Unlike other schemes, the new hen-harrier scheme will not be tied to calendar years and this provides for greater flexibility in both recruitment and payment. At this point in time I have no firm projections for payments in relation to 2017 or 2018 – this is something the Project Team is examining and will advise my Department in due course.

A budget of some €25 million has been allocated for this scheme. It is worth noting that a significant framework of support for farmers with hen-harrier designated land is already in place through my Department's agri-environment scheme GLAS. Under GLAS, farmers with hen harrier habitat qualify for a payment of €370 per hectare and can earn up to €7,000 per annum through a combination of GLAS and GLAS Plus payments. The GLAS Hen Harrier action has proved hugely successful, with some 2,678 farmers now signed up. This accounts for almost 70% of all farmers with hen harrier habitat and represents a major step forward in the conservation of the bird and in securing important additional income for the farmers concerned.

Agriculture Schemes

1391. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on introducing a grazing premium for beef and suckler cows as proposed in a study (details supplied) under pillar 1 of CAP in any future review. [38607/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The report referred to by the Deputy provides three suggested policy approaches for the EU cattle sector including the one specifically mentioned by the Deputy. I welcome the report as an important contribution to the debate on supporting the EU cattle sector overall. It should be noted that the report identifies two other policy approaches, namely market transparency and market information initiatives as well as product differentiation and institutional export promotion, as representing longer term approaches toward how the EU cattle sector could be sustainably supported in the coming decades and from which the entire sector would profit.

In general, Ireland has been supportive of a greater market orientation of the CAP, including by decoupling of payments from production, because farmers' freedom to respond to the demands of the market is vital for the long-term development of the sector, as set out in Food Wise 2025. This allows farmers to calibrate production to market demand without compromising the Basic Payment Scheme.

I am of course very aware of the importance of a strong and vibrant suckler herd to the Irish rural economy. Through Pillar II of the CAP, some €300 million of funding over a six year period has been targeted towards the national suckler herd through the Bovine Data Genomics Programme (BDGP). In response to significant demand, I reopened the BDGP programme for new entrants earlier in the year. Several other supports are in place for suckler farmers under the

RDP, notably GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer groups. I am of the view that the current range of supports available to suckler farmers is the most appropriate way to support the continued development of this sector at this time.

GLAS Payments

1392. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a low input permanent pasture grant a person (details supplied) will be paid to a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38673/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015. The payment for 2016 did not include the Low Input Permanent Pasture payment.

During the prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases in relation to the requirement to have an owned grazing enterprise to fulfil the requirements for the Low Input Permanent Pasture action.

The Department is now satisfied that the action meets scheme requirements and is actively working to reinstate the action on the online system with a view to processing the payment.

GLAS Payments

1393. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied) will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38676/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve the issue with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest possible opportunity.

Brexit Issues

1394. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will establish an enterprise stabilisation fund to assist sectors that face particular difficulties due to the reduction in the value of sterling since mid-2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38677/17]

1409. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he plans to implement to assist the beef sector due to difficulties that have arisen from the decline in the value of sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38910/17]

1410. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he plans to implement to assist the mushroom sector due to difficulties that have arisen from the decline in the value of sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38911/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1394, 1409 and 1410 together.

I fully recognise the enormous challenges Brexit poses for the agri-food and fisheries sectors, and particularly for the beef and mushroom sectors, both of which, given their reliance on the UK market for exports, are experiencing severe difficulties on foot of the fall in the value

of sterling against the euro.

The Government's response to Brexit is being co-ordinated across a range of Departments. In so far as the agri food sector is concerned, I and my Department, with the support of the Government, have been actively engaged in developing responses that will help to ameliorate this impact, for example through the new €150 million loan fund introduced as part of a package of measures announced in Budget 2017. We are also actively considering further measures that may need to be deployed over the medium- to longer-term.

However, the scale of the difficulties being created by the current period of volatility requires that other approaches be considered. Accordingly, I have been considering the need for specific EU support, and have been engaging with Commissioner Hogan and other Member States in this regard, most recently at last week's Informal Council in Estonia.

I intend to pursue the matter further by raising it at next month's AgriFish Council and by asking my colleagues to consider a range of measures that will help the Irish agri-food sector to deal with these difficulties.

Beef Exports

1395. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he expects exports of beef to China to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38678/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): China is a high priority for beef market access and significant progress has already been made. The BSE ban in respect of Irish beef was lifted by the Chinese authorities in early 2015. This was a very positive development which paved the way for the start of the process to secure access. The Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) then carried out a systems audit in Ireland in January 2016. In April 2017 together with the AQSIQ Minister Zhi Shuping, I signed a Protocol on the requirements for Frozen Beef to be exported from Ireland to China. The signing of this Protocol was a significant step towards securing beef market access. However, some further steps remain to be taken before exports commence. The next step being a plant inspection visit by the Chinese Certification and Accreditation Administration (CNCA). This visit to a sample of the beef plants that have expressed an interest in exporting beef to China has just concluded.

Despite this significant progress, the fact is that the pace of market access will be determined by the Chinese authorities, and not by my Department. My officials continue to liaise closely with their Chinese counterparts to ensure every assurance is provided in relation to the quality and safety of Irish beef.

Basic Payment Scheme

1396. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications received and approved respectively under the Scottish derogation initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38681/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Scottish Derogation measure of the Basic Payment Scheme provided for the allocation of entitlements to farmers who never held entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme and who fulfilled cer-

tain eligibility criteria as laid down under EU Regulations. Eligibility criteria included the requirement by the applicant to provide verifiable evidence of production in either of the Sheep Dairy Beef or Arable sectors on 15 May 2013. My Department received 3,430 applications under the Scottish Derogation Scheme, of which 2,126 applications were deemed successful.

Brexit Issues

1397. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit; the publication date for these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38686/17]

1398. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38702/17]

1399. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38718/17]

1400. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38734/17]

1401. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38750/17]

1402. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38766/17]

1403. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funds that have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38798/17]

1405. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38830/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1397 to 1403 inclusive and 1405 together.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach", published on 2 May, outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in the comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectorial policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

Within my own Department, we have been engaged for some time, in close consultation with stakeholders, in a process of assessing the potential threats and possible scenarios that will arise for the agri food sector post-Brexit, and discussing potential appropriate responses. Market diversification is one of those responses, and I have today announced the provision of an additional €6.745 million for Bord Bia to assist in these efforts.

Obviously the most immediate challenge being experienced by the sector, by virtue of its unique exposure to the UK market, is the significant drop in the value of sterling against the euro. The longer-term challenges include those related to tariffs and trade, divergence in regulations and standards, Northern Ireland and border issues, and certification (including veterinary and health certification). Difficult challenges in relation to potentially restricted access to fishing grounds and resources also arise. That is why, in terms of risk mitigation, I have said that our three key asks from these negotiations will be:

- (i) continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures,
- (ii) minimisation of the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries, and

(iii) maintenance of current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal, and protection of Ireland's quota share for joint fish stocks.

In terms of the ongoing exchange rate difficulties, I fully understand and appreciate the significant impact that these are having on farmers and the industry in those sectors highly exposed to the UK market. For that reason I and my Department, with the support of the Government, have been actively engaged in developing responses that will help to ameliorate this impact, for example through the €150 million loan fund introduced as part of a package of measures announced in last year's Budget. Other Budgetary measures included the introduction of new agri-taxation measures, increased funding under the Rural Development Programme and Seafood Development Programme, and the allocation of additional resources to Bord Bia to provide Brexit-related supports to affected companies.

However, the scale of the difficulties being created by the current period of volatility requires that other approaches be considered. Accordingly, I have been considering the need for specific EU support, and have been engaging with Commissioner Hogan and other Member States in this regard, most recently at last week's Informal Council in Estonia.

I intend to pursue the matter further by raising it at next month's AgriFish Council and by asking my colleagues to consider a range of measures that will help the Irish agri-food sector to deal with these difficulties.

Brexit Staff

1404. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38814/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, my Department established a dedicated Brexit Co-ordination Unit within its EU & International Trade Division. This unit now forms part of a new Brexit and International Trade Division. It comprises eight staff, including a full-time Head of Division, working full-time on the co-ordination of the various strands of Brexit activity being undertaken right across the Department.

Within the Brexit Unit there are currently no vacancies, but my Department will continue to monitor the future staffing needs of both the unit itself and the wider Department as the negotiations proceed.

Question No. 1405 answered with Question No. 1397.

Brexit Issues

1406. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38846/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Shortly after the UK Referendum result I established a Consultative Committee of Stakeholders, formalising a consultation process that had in fact been commenced some months in advance of the UK referendum. Its purpose has been to assist myself and my Department in assessing the poten-

tial impact of Brexit on the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors and in considering possible responses, and more generally to ensure a full exchange of information between all parties in advance of, and during, the negotiations.

The Committee, which consists of 31 different stakeholder groups (listed below), had its initial meeting in early July 2016, and to date has met four times, most recently on 19 July 2017. It has been complemented by the participation of all of these stakeholders in the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, in respect of which I have hosted four separate sectorial dialogues for the agri-food sector and two further dialogues for the fisheries sector since December 2016.

In addition to these interactions, my Department is also chairing the Agri-Food Sub-Group of the Brexit Economy and Trade Work Group, which in turn is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach in the context of its cross-governmental coordination of the response to Brexit. The Agri-Food Sub-Group considers input from the relevant Departments and State Agencies.

All of these consultations are helping to further inform my approach and that of my Department to the challenges presented by Brexit for the agri-food and fisheries sectors, and will continue to play a vital role in this regard.

List of participants on the Brexit Stakeholder Consultative Committee:

Irish Farmer's Association (IFA)	
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA)	
Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers' Association (ICSA)	
Macra na Feirme	
Irish Dairy Industries Association (IDIA)	
ORNUA	
Meat Industry Ireland (MII)	
Irish Egg Producers	
Commercial Mushroom Producers	
Alcoholic Beverage Federation	
Food and Drink Industry Ireland	
Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS)	
Irish Grain Feeders Association (IGFA)	
Horse Sport Ireland	
Horse Racing Ireland	
Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association (ITBA)	
Irish Greyhound Board	
Coillte	
Irish Forestry and Forest Products Association (IFFPA)	
Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation (ISWFPO)	

Irish Fish Processors & Exporters' Association (IFPEA)	
IFPO – Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)	
Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO)	
National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF)	
Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation	
Bord Bia	
Teagasc	
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	
Enterprise Ireland	
SIPTU	
Dept. of the Taoiseach	

Brexit Issues

1407. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38878/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has conducted a range of analysis and research activities in relation to Brexit. This work is ongoing, and is primarily concerned with the implications of Brexit for agri-food trade with the UK across different sectors.

For example, both internally and in consultation with the relevant stakeholders through the Brexit Stakeholder Consultative Committee and the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, my Department has established the extent of sectorial reliance on the UK market, the potential implications of Brexit for each sector and the possible responses to the challenges presented. It has also been analysing the potential practical impact on the day-to-day functioning of trade flows, as well as potential WTO tariffs that might be applied to Ireland's agri-food exports to the UK in the event of a 'hard' Brexit.

The agencies reporting to my Department have also undertaken important research in relation to Brexit, with Teagasc publishing reports on, for example, the potential implications for the Irish agri-food sector in overall terms and on the implications for family farm incomes, and Bord Bia conducting important work through its Brexit Barometer.

In addition, my Department is in contact with the relevant agencies and with other Departments to co-ordinate further research on the implications of Brexit for the agri-food industry.

Departmental Expenditure

1408. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38894/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report sets out the pre-Budget expenditure ceiling for my Department of €1,270 million for current expenditure and €238 million for capital expenditure. This represents the spending baseline for examination of my Department's budgetary priorities for 2018.

As outlined in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, the increases planned in expenditure for the delivery of public services are set at sustainable levels in order to ensure that the resources allocated are affordable both now and in the future. Consequently, it is important that there is an ongoing focus on the totality of Departmental spending and not just the incremental increase each year.

This was the context for this year's Spending Review which will support the consideration of existing expenditure alongside budgetary proposals during the Budget Estimates process.

Expenditure on the schemes and services operated by my Department are kept under constant review throughout the year. These schemes and services are subject to a range of external factors such as demand from beneficiaries, market and economic factors, animal disease incidence, and the pace of completion of capital investment and research projects as well as the need to adhere to important issues of governance, legal and contractual obligations, including compliance with national and EU operational rules and requirements.

Where any savings are identified during the Estimates process they can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space. Work is ongoing in this regard.

Question No. 1409 answered with Question No. 1394.

Question No. 1410 answered with Question No. 1394.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme Data

1411. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of mushroom farmers and businesses that have been approved to participate in the special agri-loan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38912/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The last summary of the Agriculture Cashflow Support Scheme provided to my Department by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) showed that, up to the end of June, there were 3,672 loan drawdowns amounting to a total of €117,308,197 (or 78% of the total). This is an average loan amount of €31,947. Some 59% of the loans are for terms of 4 years or more. A breakdown by sector, which shows 11 loans to the horticulture sector totalling €878,500, is as follows:

Sector	Totals €	% of funds	No. of Loans	Average Loan size
Dairy	49,893,145	43%	1,358	36,740
Beef	48,653,826	41%	1,788	27,211
Sheep	2,597,000	2%	127	20,449
Pigs	1,509,000	1%	18	83,833
Tillage	7,739,465	7%	168	46,068
Horticulture	878,500	1%	11	79,864
Other	6,037,261	5%	202	29,887

Total	117,308,197	100%	3,672	31,947
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The participating banks have advised that all of the remaining €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. More detailed figures and analysis, including detail on sub-sectors such as mushroom growing, will be available once the Scheme has been fully drawn down and all reporting is finalised.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme

1412. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce long-term low-cost loan measures to assist agribusinesses improve competitiveness due to the particular challenges that will arise from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38918/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), and made €150 million available to farmers throughout Ireland at low-cost interest rates of 2.95%. It provided farmers with a low-cost, flexible source of working capital, allowing them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises. The Scheme was launched on 31 January 2017 and by the beginning of March, all of the participating banks had reported that their funds were committed.

The SBCI have reported that, to the end of June 2017, there have been 3,672 loan draw-downs amounting to a total of €117.3 million (or 78% of the total). This is an average loan amount of almost €32,000. Some 59% of the loans are for terms of 4 years or more. The participating banks have advised that all of the remaining €150m is in the process of being drawn down.

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

I believe that this scheme demonstrates the importance of lower cost and more flexible finance as a response to competitive pressures, and I hope that it will be a model for possible future measures.

GLAS Payments

1413. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38939/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has been paid in full for the 2015 scheme year.

The 85% payment for 2016 has been processed and payment has issued to the person named.

All GLAS 1 participants are required to submit a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) before the 2016 15% payment can be made. When the NMP on behalf of the person named is submitted the balancing payment checks can be completed.

Brexit Issues

1414. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the State is preparing an application to the European Commission to authorise a multimillion euro package of state aid to help farmers deal with price fluctuations in sterling arising from the Brexit vote. [38946/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Brexit poses enormous challenges for the Irish agri-food and fisheries sectors, the most immediate of which arises in the form of the significant fall in the value of sterling against the euro, which has become particularly acute recently.

I fully understand and appreciate the significant impact that this is having on farmers. Indeed, I and my Department, with the support of the Government, have been actively engaged in developing responses that will help to ameliorate this impact, for example through the new €150 million loan fund introduced as part of a package of measures announced in Budget 2017. We are also actively considering further measures that may need to be deployed over the medium- to longer-term.

However, the scale of the difficulties being created by the current period of volatility requires that other approaches be considered. Accordingly, I have been considering the need for specific EU support, and have been engaging with Commissioner Hogan and other Member States in this regard, most recently at last week's Informal Council in Estonia.

I intend to pursue the matter further by raising it at next month's AgriFish Council and by asking my colleagues to consider a range of measures that will help the Irish agri-food sector to deal with these difficulties.

Crop Losses

1415. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied to the crop loss compensation scheme by county, in tabular form; and when payments will issue. [38947/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In July I launched the Weather Related Crop Damage Measure for tillage farmers impacted by adverse weather in September 2016. Commercial cereal growers who experienced greater than 30% loss in tonnes of eligible crops sold as a result of the wet harvest conditions in September 2016 were eligible to apply for aid. The eligible crops under the measures are spring wheat, spring barley, spring oats and spring oilseed rape

162 applications have been received under this Measure. The closing date was 25 August.

These applications are currently being examined for completeness and compliance with eligibility requirements as set out in the Scheme Terms and Conditions. Following this process, the applications will be subject to the standard administrative and on the ground verification procedures. Following this, cleared files will be processed for payment.

The county breakdown of the applications received is as follows.

County	Applicants
Cork	82
Donegal	25
Galway	22
Kerry	7
Kilkenny	1
Longford	4
Louth	2
Mayo	4
Meath	2
Roscommon	6
Tipperary	4
Waterford	1
Wexford	2
	162

GLAS Eligibility

1416. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who are active in the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS, who are eligible for GLAS+ payments; the estimated average payment for eligible persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38948/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Based on the current participation levels in GLAS 1 and 2, there are 2,633 applicants deemed eligible for GLAS+ payments.

It is only when the 2017 payment processing is complete that the average annual GLAS+ value for GLAS 1, GLAS 2 and GLAS 3 participants will be available.

Illegal Dumping

1417. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of a complaint submitted by a person (details supplied); if his Department has sought a report from the county council named; if other agencies of the State have been contacted by his Department to assist in the investigation of the matter; if the contractors or subcontractors for the roads contracts have been interviewed or investigated; if the chief executive of the council involved has submitted a report on the complaint; if the dumping was supervised by council staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36873/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The primary responsibility for the management of any waste, including costs for removal or disposal, lies with the holder of the waste, i.e. the natural or legal person in possession of the waste, or the producer of the waste. The Waste Management Act 1996 (as amended) imposes a general duty of care on holders of waste, under which a person may not hold, transport, recover or dispose of waste in a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, environmental pollution. Penalties for serious dumping offences provided for under the Waste Management

Acts are substantial. Persons who are found to be responsible for, or involved in, the unauthorised disposal of waste are liable to a maximum fine of €3,000 on summary conviction and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months, and to a maximum fine of €15 million on conviction on indictment and/or imprisonment for up to 10 years.

Enforcement actions against illegal waste activity are statutorily a matter for the local authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). I understand that the local authority concerned continue to engage with the EPA with respect to this complaint. As the statutory agency with responsibility for enforcement of waste legislation, the EPA is the appropriate agency for adjudicating on and pursuing such cases.

Under section 60(3) of the Waste Management Act 1996, as Minister, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance by the EPA or a local authority, in particular circumstances, of a statutory function vested in it, including enforcement functions.

Telephone Call Charges

1418. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the guidelines in place to ensure persons are made aware that lo-call 1890 numbers may be more expensive to call from a mobile than landlines; his plans to ensure persons calling State offices are aware of this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37429/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The matter raised in the Question is a customer service issue for each individual public body including Government Departments. The use and display of telephone numbers is an area in which I have no statutory function. The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) manages and administers the National Numbering Scheme which lists all numbers and codes that are available for use on public telecommunications networks. ComReg, which is independent in the exercise of its functions, has established a variety of access code types, in accordance with international norms, including:

- geographic numbering where charges are incurred by the caller at a local or national rate;
- 1850 numbers which share the costs between the caller and the service provider at a fixed rate when called from a fixed line number, and
- 1890 numbers which share the costs between the caller and the service provider having regard to the duration of the call when called from a fixed line number.

I understand that ComReg has recently launched a public consultation in relation to non-geographic numbers with a view to increasing transparency on the pricing of calls on these lines.

I welcome this significant initiative by ComReg which will be of benefit to all consumers. It will also strengthen the Regulator's role in consumer protection. It represents a useful opportunity for the public and all stakeholders to engage with ComReg on its proposals that will enhance transparency on pricing and streamline number ranges to improve services for users. I would encourage people to participate and contribute in the consultation process and make their views known. The consultation documents and relevant documentation together with an infographic, research findings and proposals are all available on ComReg's website at www.comreg.ie/ngnreview. The consultation period will run until 12 October 2017.

While I cannot compel public bodies including Government Departments and offices to use or display any particular telephone access codes in preference to alternative codes available, I would draw the Deputy's attention to arrangements in my Department which operates an 1890 lo-call option for users contacting my Department from fixed line numbers and a standard 01-6782000 access code which allows mobile phone users to contact my Department at the standard rate charged by their service provider or within their bundled minutes package. Other Government Departments offering a lo-call number also offer a standard phone number which can be accessed both from within and outside Ireland and which may be less expensive for mobile users to use.

Recreational Angling Sector

1419. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will impose a ban on fishing within 64m of the weir at a location (details supplied) [37544/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): I have requested Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the State body with responsibility for the inland fisheries resource, to consider the need for a Bye-law as suggested in the question and to provide me with appropriate scientific and management advice.

I have been informed by IFI that no requests for such a measure on behalf of the local angling groups has been received.

One local individual recently indicated his intention to submit a proposal for a Byelaw restricting angling in the area of the fish pass, once planned remedial works to be carried out by the Local Authority to repair a breach in the weir cap are complete.

While I understand that the Local Authority has not commenced the proposed works, I will have IFI consider the matter.

Inland Fisheries Data

1420. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the allocation in each of the past ten years per annum for the restocking of hatcheries and rivers; and the areas in current and capital expenditure in which it has been spent. [38492/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), the state agency responsible for the protection, management and conservation of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources was established in July 2010 following an amalgamation of the former Central and 7 Regional Fishery Boards. Details of overall out-turns from Exchequer allocations to IFI, in the period 2011 (IFI's first full year of operation) to date, to support its wide range of functions are set out in the table below.

The allocation is not disaggregated between operational functions and there is, consequently, no specific allocation for hatcheries and spawning beds. The support of all functions is a day to day operational matter for the Board of IFI.

In addition, IFI generates own income, which is used to contribute to its overall spend. Details of own income is also detailed in the table.

Year	Exchequer Allocation	Own Income
2011	€24,945,000	€4,994,312
2012	€25,448,000	€5,224,981
2013	€28,258,604	€4,573,509
2014	€24,417,000	€4,177,793
2015	€23,875,624	€2,954,681
2016	€26,803,338	€2,615,225 (Subject to Audit)
2017	€26,578,000	€2,900,000 (estimated)

Broadcasting Sector

1421. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he plans to bring forward amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36787/17]

1422. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his legislative plans to provide for the collection of readmission fees by broadcasters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36788/17]

1425. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the licence fee revenue he expects will be retained on an annual basis for the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, BAI; the impact this will have on revenue for broadcasting companies (details supplied), in view of the proposed head 2 of the general scheme of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36791/17]

1441. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the changes he is planning on making to the funding of public broadcasting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37727/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1421, 1422, 1425 and 1441 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have obtained Government approval to proceed with the drafting of a number of legislative amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009 including amendment of the provisions of the Act relating to the broadcasting levy to alleviate the burden on broadcasters. The proposals provide that a portion of the licence fee receipts will be paid to BAI to help defray their administrative costs. This will reduce the overall levy to be paid by the sector and would be applied evenly across all broadcasters. The amount of the reduction would be contingent on the overall level of licence fee receipts.

The proposals also provide for the introduction of a new funding scheme to offer bursaries to journalists working in local or community radio stations and to provide for tendering for TV Licence fee collection.

The proposed amendments are currently being considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment under Pre-Legislative Scrutiny.

Television Licence Fee

1423. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for legislation to ensure that pay television providers operating here must ensure subscribers have a television licence before entering into a contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36789/17]

1424. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to progress the legislation previously approved by Cabinet that would allow the television licence collection agent access to the subscription data of pay television providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36790/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1423 and 1424 together.

As the Deputy is aware, I have obtained Government approval to proceed with the drafting of a number of legislative amendments to the Broadcasting Act 2009. The proposed amendments are currently being considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action & Environment under Pre-Legislative Scrutiny.

The previous Government gave approval for the preparation of legislation to enable the TV Licence Collection Agent (currently An Post) to access the subscription data held by TV service providers. This proposal is not being pursued in the current amendments.

The issue of subscriber contracts is a commercial matter between the subscriber and the contract provider and I have no role in relation to such contracts.

Question No. 1425 answered with Question No. 1421.

North-South Interconnector

1426. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has given further consideration to the concerns outlined by public representatives in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath in relation to the draft terms of reference for the independent study in relation to the proposed North-South interconnector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36861/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have approved the appointment of independent experts to carry out this study and their work has commenced. The consultants are: Bo Normark (Chair), Prof. Ronnie Belmans and Prof. Keith Bell. This Independent Expert Group is expected to deliver their final report by 31 January 2018. The terms of reference fulfil the central point of the motions that were passed in both Houses. That is to “*examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the North-South Interconnector, taking into account the most recent developments in technology and experience gained from existing projects abroad*” .

There were three key areas of concern raised in the meetings that I held with Oireachtas members both prior to and after the publication of the terms of reference and also in the meetings that my officials held with Monaghan Anti-Pylon Committee and North East Pylon Pressure Campaign. The first two of these – construction and operation costs, and technical feasibility – are included in the terms of reference.

A third strand of issues were raised in these meetings, but these cannot be included. Firstly, An Bord Pleanála and the statutory planning process is the appropriate method by which such impacts are assessed and evaluated. Secondly, it is not possible to quantify such impacts with

any degree of certainty. As such, it would therefore be a qualitative assessment. However, as the level of compensation provided to land and property owners is considered to be a reflection of the impact of such factors on land and property values, I have commissioned an additional study to focus on the “Levels of Compensation Provided to Land and Property Owners in Proximity to High-Voltage Transmission Lines in a European Context.” This study will deliver a significant body of independently collated information on comparative practices in a number of jurisdictions. My Department is currently finalising the procurement of the necessary expertise to complete this study, and the study is expected to be completed in early 2018.

Departmental Staff Data

1427. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36949/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the tables:

2015	-
Minister White	
Position	Salary per annum
Special Adviser to Minister	€82,587
Special Adviser to Minister	€91,624
Personal Secretary	€23,820
Personal Assistant	€49,790
Civilian Driver x 2	€34,700
2016	-
Minister White (up to 6/5/16)	
Position	Salary per annum
Special Adviser to Minister	€82,587
Special Adviser to Minister	€91,624
Personal Secretary	€23,820
Personal Assistant	€49,790
Civilian Driver x 2	€34,700
Minister Naughten (6/5/16)*	
Position	Salary per annum
Special Adviser to Minister (appointed 27/06/2016)	€88,936
Special Adviser to Minister (appointed 13/06/2016)	€79,401
Civilian Driver (appointed 09/05/2016)	€34,700

Civilian Driver (appointed 30/05/2016)	€34,700
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*With effect from the 32nd Dáil, Personal Secretaries and Personal Assistants of office holders are paid under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance by the Houses of the Oireachtas, not by the individual Department.

2017 to Date	-	-
Minister Naughten		
Position	Salary per annum	Pay adjustments in accordance with the Financial Emergency Measures Act wef 1/4/17
Special Adviser to Minister (appointed 27/06/2016)	€88,936	€91,716
Special Adviser to Minister (appointed 13/06/2016)	€79,401	€81,767
Civilian Driver (appointed 09/05/2016)	€34,700	€35,700
Civilian Driver (appointed 30/05/2016)	€34,700	€35,700
Minister Of State Kyne** (wef 20/06/2017 – re-appointed as Minister of State)		
Position	Salary per annum	
Civilian Driver (appointed 09/05/2016)	€35,700	
Civilian Driver (appointed 30/05/2016)	€35,700	

**Minister of States Staff for 2015 & 2016 and 2017 (up to 19/6/17) were paid by Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

No civil or public servants were seconded to work within my department or constituency officers for the periods in question. The numbers of civil service staff assigned to both my private and constituency offices are within the limits prescribed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines.

Fishing Industry

1428. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on whether the culture and knowledge required for eel fisherman either for commercial fishing or scientific research fisheries needs to be safeguarded for the future; his plans to have the issue examined in cooperation with IFI, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and fishermen that have the necessary knowledge of this ancient method of fishing and identity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37045/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Kyne): I refer to the reply to Parliamentary Question No.1249 of 26 July 2017. In addition, Inland Fisheries Ireland has engaged a number of former eel fishermen around the country in an eel research fishery which commenced in 2016. This research is in-

tended to contribute to informing a review, due in 2018, of the existing management measures contained in Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP). The EMP has been approved by the European Commission under EU Regulation 1100/2007.

Departmental Staff Data

1429. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of women and men, respectively, employed in his Department in tabular form. [37068/17]

1430. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of men and women, respectively, in his Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37079/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1429 and 1430 together.

The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following tables:

Staff Numbers as at 31/8/17	Female	Male
380	185	195
Grade (and equivalent)	Female	Male
Secretary General	0	1
Second Secretary	0	0
Deputy Secretary General	0	0
Assistant Secretary	1	4
Principal Officer	11	25
Assistant Principal	32	54

Broadband Service Provision

1431. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address the concerns of a person (details supplied) regarding broadband in their area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37168/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broad-

band services and the AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

Also in April, eir signed a agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90-week period with an average of 500 premises passed per day. Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are published on my Department's website. The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

The address referred to in the Question falls within a LIGHT BLUE area on the High Speed Broadband Map and is covered by eir's planned rural deployment. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. With regard to this rollout, decisions as to when areas and premises are served, is an operational matter for eir. My Department had no input in that process.

Illegal Dumping

1432. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of funding spent by local authorities on an annual basis in clearing up illegal dumping and littering throughout the country; the amount received from the various recycling and civic amenity centres throughout the country; if more is being spent on cleaning up illegal dumping than is being raised at these centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37213/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The cost of illegal dumping is not collated by my Department as it includes local authority enforcement, disposal and legal costs and also involves costs for other State agencies such as An Garda Síochána. Local authorities are requested to provide details of their expenditure under the Litter Pollution Acts on litter prevention and control on an annual basis to my Department. Such expenditure includes street and road cleaning, litter warden services and public awareness initiatives. In 2016 (latest available figures), local authorities spent approximately €96 million nationally on litter control and prevention. My role, as Minister, is to provide the legislative and policy framework under which both local authority and EPA enforcement action against illegal dumping and littering as appropriate is initiated. The Litter Pollution Acts 1997 to 2009 provide the statutory framework to combat littering; under the Acts, the primary management and enforcement response to littering is a matter for local authorities, taking account of its own local circumstances and priorities. Enforcement action in relation to illegal dumping is a matter for the relevant local authority concerned and also the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE), which supervises the environmental protection activities of local authorities.

The income derived by local authorities from Civic Amenity Sites operating in their functional areas is not collated by my Department but financial penalties for serious dumping offences available under the Waste Management Acts are substantial and range from a maximum fine of €5,000 on summary conviction to a maximum fine of €15 million on conviction on indictment and represent an opportunity to significantly defray enforcement and clean-up costs.

In terms of litter enforcement, the €150 on-the-spot fine for littering offences is one of a range of measures aimed at tackling the problem of litter in Ireland. In addition, under the Protection of the Environment Act 2003, penalties attaching to litter offences are also substantial. This Act introduced conviction on indictment for litter offences with a maximum fine of

€130,000, and set the maximum fine for summary conviction at €4,000.

My Department has also developed an anti-dumping initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. In response to the hugely positive reaction from local authorities and communities since I launched this measure earlier this year, I have made further funds available to support it. The initial allocation of €650,000 has been doubled with total funding of €1.3 million now being made available to support the clean-up of dumping black-spots and to target those who engage in this illegal practice.

Departmental Banking

1433. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made. [37221/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Year	Debit Card Charges €	Credit Card Charges €	Banking Fees & Charges €	Fees for processing credit card and online sales receipts €
2017 (to date)	0	69.67	5738.31	426.61
2016	0	75.12	2635.66	1008.60
2015	0	86.31	778.07	2129.73
2014	0	160.37	758.07	1385.77
2013	0	148.20	192.25	1257.36

The above payments in respect of banking fees and charges, along with credit card charges were made to Bank of Ireland, while fees for processing receipts relating to the Geological Survey of Ireland's online and credit card sales were paid to Elavon.

Broadband Service Provision

1434. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding fibre broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37388/17]

1435. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of a fibre optic installation in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37414/17]

1437. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a company (details supplied) plans to install broadband in an area (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37518/17]

1448. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will extend the provision of broadband to a house (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37861/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1434, 1435, 1437 and 1448 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high-speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

- The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high-speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

Also in April, eir signed a agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period with an average of 500 premises passed per day.

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are published on my Department's website. The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

The position in relation to the areas referred to by the Deputies is set out below.

Towland	County	Number of premises	AMBER premises State led Intervention area	BLUE premises commercial operators	Light BLUE planned rural deployment by eir
Knocktaggle	Kerry	51	10	9	32
Rockfield	Kerry	29	1	2	26
Annaghilymore	Kerry	58	55 (including eircodes referenced in the Question)		3

A full set of county statistics are available at www.broadband.gov.ie. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

I would encourage members of the general public who are in a BLUE area but who cannot access a high speed broadband service from at least one operator at present to contact my Department at broadband@dccae.gov.ie, quoting their contact details, eircode, query details, details of the operators they have contacted and conveying their permission for my Department to forward such details to the participating operators. My Department is working with operators to ensure that all such locations will be in receipt of high-speed broadband as soon as possible.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who

will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with “Detailed Solutions” to be submitted by bidders later this month.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the rollout of the high-speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a task force to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention

Waste Tyre Disposal

1436. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the collection of old and disused tyres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37477/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The new structures which I am introducing for tyres and waste tyres will come into effect on 1 October 2017. The new structures will not limit the number of waste collectors collecting waste tyres. All waste collectors who are permitted by the National Waste Collection Permit Office to collect tyres will be able to do so under the new structures. They will however have to register with, and report tyre collections to, an approved body. I will be approving Repak ELT as that body once the regulations giving effect to the new structures are finalised.

Question No. 1437 answered with Question No. 1434.

Natural Gas Imports

1438. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views regarding the recent decision of the Port of Cork to enter into a joint venture with a company (details supplied) to import liquefied natural gas extracted through fracking in the United States, in view of the recent ban on fracking here due to of the serious environmental damage caused by same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37609/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The production, sourcing, buying and selling of natural gas produced outside this jurisdiction is an operational matter for the undertakings involved. I have no policy remit in relation the means of energy production in other countries. In this jurisdiction, since 2002, the regulation of the gas market has been the responsibility of the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), which is independent in the performance of its functions. I have no direct statutory function in relation to liquefied natural gas projects, including specific projects such as this project, nor in relation to ports policy. The announced investment decision is a commercial matter for project promoters to take.

Waste Disposal

1439. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has investigated the use of anaerobic digestion systems in waste disposal and energy production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37696/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In order to maximise the resource potential and minimise disposal of our waste, the European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015 build on the Waste Management (Food Waste) Regulations 2009. These two sets of regulations place clear obligations on waste collectors, businesses and households to promote the segregation and recovery of food waste for purposes of producing energy, compost and digestate, thereby supporting job creation in the waste and bio-energy sectors. The Regulations also facilitate the achievement of the targets set out in the Landfill Directive (Directive 99/31/EC) for the diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill sites, by directing source-segregated household food waste to composting and to other forms of treatment.

There are positive indications that the implementation and enforcement of these Regulations are resulting in more food waste being diverted from landfill. The Environmental Protection Agency recently published Compost and Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Statistics for 2015 which highlighted that the quantity of waste accepted for treatment at composting and AD plants increased from 271 ktonnes in 2013 to 300 ktonnes in 2015 (11% increase).

The Programme for Government and the White Paper on Energy Policy recognise that anaerobic digestion (AD) technology can utilise waste as a resource to produce renewable energy, while the National Mitigation Plan summarises the role anaerobic digestion could provide in reducing carbon emissions.

The REFIT3 (Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff) scheme currently supports the production of electricity in 13 AD plants. In addition, my Department has undertaken a detailed economic assessment on the design and cost of introducing a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) in Ireland. This assessment included a broad range of renewable energy technologies, including the potential for the injection of biomethane produced in AD plants into the natural gas grid. The primary focus of the RHI is on large commercial and industrial heat users in the non-Emissions Trading Scheme to ensure the scheme is cost effective.

The final public consultation process on the design and implementation of the new RHI closed earlier this year with the findings informing final decisions in relation to the scheme. I will be bringing a proposal to Government in the coming weeks in relation to the scheme. Subsequent to a Government decision, a process for State Aid clearance from the European Commission will commence.

Last week, I launched a public consultation on the design options for a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). This follows on from the RESS Technology Review consultation which identified a range of technologies, including AD technologies, to be further assessed. The consultation will remain open until 3 November 2017.

Television Licence Fee Collection

1440. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has considered the possible impacts that outsourcing the collection of television licence could have on An Post's revenue. [37726/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As the Deputy will be aware, I have obtained Government approval to draft a number of legislative amendments to the Broadcasting Act, 2009, including amendments to allow for the tendering of TV Licence fee collection, and the proposed amendments are currently being considered by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Climate Action &

Environment under Pre-Legislative Scrutiny. In tandem with this, I recently asked the Office of Government Procurement to issue a Request for Information to see what services the market may be able to offer in respect of TV Licence fee collection. The result of this will help inform any tender process once the legislative amendments are in place to provide for a procurement process.

Whatever form any future tender process might take, it is my intention that the post office network should remain central to the sale of television licences.

In the meantime, there will be no change to the existing TV licence fee arrangements and An Post continues to work as my issuing agent in accordance with Section 145 of the Act.

Question No. 1441 answered with Question No. 1421.

Departmental Expenditure

1442. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the investment his Department has made in the Cavan, Monaghan and Meath areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37728/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department provides investment under a number of schemes in Counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. Details of the funding provided from 2016 to date are set out in the following tables:

ENERGY					
The Better Energy Homes scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. The scheme supports private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their home. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating system upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER). Across 2016 and to date in 2017, €1.5m in grant funding has been provided to 1,431 homes across Cavan, Monaghan and Meath.					

	2016		2017 (YTD)		Total
County	Homes	Grants	Homes	Grants	
Cavan	193	€175,300	91	€114,000	€289,300
Meath	645	€671,600	373	€419,750	€1,091,350
Monaghan	81	€101,610	48	€65,350	€166,960
Total	919	€948,510	512	€599,100	€1,547,610

The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme delivers a range of energy efficiency measures, free of charge, to low income households vulnerable to energy poverty that meet the defined eligibility criteria. The measures typically provided include draught proofing, attic insulation, lagging jackets for hot water tanks, low energy light bulbs, cavity wall insulation and energy advice. In 2016 and to date in 2017, €2.08m in grant funding has been provided to 996 homes across Cavan, Monaghan and Meath.					
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	2016		2017 (YTD)		Total
County	Homes	Spend	Homes	Spend	
Cavan	90	€239,935	44	€112,515	€352,450
Meath	697	€1,363,537	98	191,673	€1,555,21

Questions - Written Answers

Monaghan	45	€114,303	22	61,010	€175,313
Total	832	€1,717,777	164	€365,199	€2,082,976

The Better Energy Communities scheme provides grants to community based partnerships to improve the thermal and electrical efficiency of the building stock and energy poor homes and facilities. Projects are typically based across a number of counties so it is not possible to report on a county by county basis. In 2016 €4,687,591 was paid out to projects which included elements within Cavan, Monaghan and Meath. In 2017, €3,317,488 in grant funding has been allocated to projects which include elements in Cavan, Monaghan and Meath.

ENVIRONMENT

Anti-Litter & Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme promotes anti-litter activities and create awareness of litter issues amongst the general public.

Location (Cavan/Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Investment
Cavan	€15,000	0	€15,000
Meath	€20,000	0	€20,000
Monaghan	€15,000	0	€15,000
			Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund promotes sustainable development by assisting small scale environmental projects at local level.
Location (Cavan/Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Investment
Cavan	€8,500	€9,775	€18,275
Meath	€15,575	€18,050	€33,807
Monaghan	€8,475	€9,775	€18,250

- Note all payments were direct to local authorities who are responsible for the administration of the above schemes

Diesel Oil Claims

Location (Cavan/Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Investment
Monaghan		€18,838	€18,838
Monaghan	€98,044		€98,044
			Historic Tyre Piles
Location (Cavan/Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Investment
Monaghan	€20,000		€20,000
Monaghan		€32,668	€32,668

The Landfill Remediation Grant Scheme was established in order to deal with the specific issue of the remediation of closed, licensed, local authority-operated landfills, and in recognition of the fact that local authorities would not have sufficient resources to fund the full cost of

this remediation.

Location (Cavan/ Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Invest- ment
Meath	€499,705		€499,705
Cavan	€582,821		€582,821
			Environmental En- forcement Grant
Location (Cavan/ Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Invest- ment
Monaghan	€204,833		€204,833
Meath	€259,000		€259,000
Cavan	€278,000		€278,000
			Waste Repatriation
Location (Cavan/ Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of Invest- ment
Monaghan	€301,291		€301,291

COMMUNICATIONS

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is an initiative under the Government's National Digital Strategy, and is specifically designed to support small and micro enterprises to trade online. The scheme offers financial assistance of up to €2,500, subject to match funding, coupled with training, mentoring and networking supports to help small businesses to develop their online trading capability. Small businesses, with 10 or fewer employees and less than €2m in revenue, that have little or no capacity to trade online, are eligible to apply.

The demand-led scheme is funded by the Department and delivered on a nationwide basis by the Local Enterprise Office (LEO). Businesses must be located within the jurisdiction of the LEO to which they apply. The following table shows the amount of funding provided to LEO Cavan, LEO Meath and LEO Monaghan under the Trading Online Voucher Scheme for 2016 and 2017 to end of August.

Location (Cavan/ Meath/Monaghan)	2016	2017 to end August	Total value of invest- ment
Cavan	€24,613	€13,289	€37,902
Meath	€34,594	€30,323	€64,917
Monaghan	€29,378	€32,550	€61,928

Projects funded/partially funded by DCCAE through Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)

IFI have a €2m grant scheme currently open for applications. This is broken down as follows:

- Salmon Conservation Fund to a maximum of €500,000
- Midland Fisheries Fund of €50,000
- National Strategy for Angling Development Fund of €1,500,000

Questions - Written Answers

Name of investment scheme	Location (Cavan/Meath/Monaghan)	Description	Value of investment	Awarded in 2016	2017 to end August
Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Hollybank Lake, Arvagh Access Road and Car Park ImprovementsCavan County Council	Hollybank Lake is a popular angling spot for pleasure and competitive angling. This project aims to improve access to the lake including upgrading the current access road, which is currently in poor condition, and the car park.	€16,920	Yes	
Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Lough Sheelin Safety MeasuresCavan County Council	Provision of safety measures at Lough Sheelin including the purchase of 30 marker buoys, chains, shackles and anchor blocks.	€3,618	Yes	
Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Bun Lake Car Park and Access Road ImprovementsCavan County Council	Upgrading the car park and access road at Bun Lough, Belturbet. This is a prime angling location and the project aims to improve access to the lakeside and make the site more attractive. This project will add to the scope of leisure activities in Belturbet by improving the angling product in the town and wider region.	€14,913	Yes	

Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Putiaghan Lake Lay-By UpgradeCavan County Council	Resurfacing the lake lay-by on N3 at Putiaghan Lough. The lay-by is undersized and overgrown and this project aims to deliver a proper lay-by which delivers adequate and safe parking facility for anglers.	€9,112	Yes	
Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Nadreegeel Loughs – Site Clearance, Car Park Improvement and Signage DevelopmentCavan County Council	This is a popular fishing location with potential for development. This project will enhance the venue by adding a Disabled Access platform and reviewing existing facilities to ensure that Lacken Lake can be used by anglers of all abilities. This work will also include improvements to the car park and informational signage developments.	€16,500	Yes	

Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Mentrim Lake – Improved Angling AccessMentrim & District Anglers Community Organisation	Project to make lake accessible to anglers and wider community by providing more fishing areas, installing fishing stands, upgrading and expanding the car park, improving the entrance from the main road, clearing the walking area, bridging drains and providing start up fishing courses for all types of fishing and anglers of all ages.	€10,500	Yes	
Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Lough More Greagh Emyvale – enable easier angling accessLough Moore and Blackwater Anglers Association	Install iron devices on boat dock to enable anglers to get in and out of boat. In particular, the devices should allow older anglers to grip them and lower themselves into boat or lever themselves upwards when disembarking the boat.	€450	Yes	
Capital Grants Scheme 2016	Bairds Shore Access Road and Kilroosky Parking AreaMonaghan County Council	Resurfacing and pruning along Bairds Shore Access Road which is currently in poor condition , construction of new car parking area at Kilroosky and installation of 13 new signs throughout the district of Ballybay-Clones to direct anglers to lakes and fishing stands in the area.	€20,364	Yes	

Salmon Conservation Fund	River Boyne (Kells Blackwater)The Curly Hole, Townland: Townley Hall and Oldbridge	Restoration works on the River Boyne at the Curly Hole, Oldbridge, Co. Meath,	€50,000	Yes	
Salmon Conservation Fund	River Boyne (Kells Blackwater)Kells Blackwater at Martry Mill, Townland	Project is aimed at facilitating free passage of salmon and all fish at Martry Weir on the Kells Blackwater at Martry, Co. Meath	€46,000	Yes	
Salmon Conservation Fund	Martry River (tributary of Kells Blackwater) Ballybeg, Co. Meath	River bank restoration, stock proofing and habitat rehabilitation	€15,000	Yes	
Salmon Conservation Fund	Kells Blackwater (Boyne), Carnaross, Kells, Co. Meath	River bank restoration, stock proofing and habitat rehabilitation	€15,000	Yes	
Salmon Conservation Fund	River Fane, Lannat, Inniskeen, Co. Monaghan	Tree Pruning, introduction of gravel into areas void of existing gravel to encourage salmon spawning, construction of 3 low water weirs to scour and clean gravel and pools.	€4,892	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Monaghan	National Junior Pike Final Angling Competition	€250	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Killeshandra, Cavan	NCFEI Youth All Ireland Angling Competition	€5,344	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Canal, Enfield. Meath	6 week Youth Angling Coaching Programme	€240	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Lisanisk Lake, Monaghan	Carrickmacross Juvenile Angling Summer Camp 2016	€1,727	Yes	

Questions - Written Answers

IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Arvagh, Cavan	(1) Arvagh Breffni Seniors Angling Competition; (2) Arvagh Breffni Open Angling Competition; (3) Arvagh International Coarse Fishing Festival; (4) Arvagh King of Clubs Angling Competition	€11,043	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Leitrim/Cavan/Fermanagh	Cross-Border Angling Competition	€9,161	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Cootehill, Cavan	Cootehill Fishing Festival	€5,521	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Lakes in Ballybay area, Monaghan	Ballybay 2 Day Fishing Festival	€500	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2016	Lakes in Ballybay area, Monaghan	NCCFI Senior & Ladies All Ireland Championship	€1,145	Yes	
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Lakes around Arvagh, Cavan	Breffni Seniors Angling Competition	€9,943		Yes
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Lakes around Arvagh, Cavan	Breffni Challenge Angling Competition	€9,943		Yes
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Lough Gowna and surrounding lakes, Cavan	Fitzpatricks Gowna Angling Competition / Festival	€750		Yes
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Boyne Canal, Navan, Meath	NCAC Open Day Juvenile Angling Coaching	€400		Yes
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Lisanisk Lake, Carrickmacross, Monaghan	Juvenile Angling Summer camp 2017	€500		Yes
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Lough Sillan, Cootehill, Cavan	Junior Feeder All Ireland Angling Competition	€250		Yes
IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Cavan /Leitrim area. venues to be finalised	Juvenile All Ireland and Interprovincial Championships	€2,026		Yes

IFI Sponsorship Fund 2017	Event will be held in Monaghan/ Cavan area venues to be finalised	Senior and Ladies All Ireland Championship	€5,344		Yes
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Waste Disposal

1443. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the different items that are allowed in green or black bins and the way in which his Department plans to educate persons on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37729/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Since 2013, a series of Regulations have been introduced to deal with the disposal of food waste and bio-waste. As part of this phased introduction, brown bins have been introduced on a gradual basis, starting in the largest population centres and extending to smaller centres of population. The European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015 (S.I. 430 of 2015) are designed to promote the segregation and recovery of household food waste. Regulations 6 and 7 impose obligations on householders, which *inter alia*, require householders who avail of a household waste collection service, and are supplied with a food waste bin in line with the Regulations, to place food waste in the food waste bin. My Department has worked with the Composting and Anaerobic Digestion Association of Ireland to develop a website, www.brownbin.ie, to provide the public with the information required to use the brown bin appropriately. This includes advice on the types of material which should and should not be placed in a household brown bin and guidance on food waste prevention and home composting.

The Seventh Schedule to the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, (S.I. 820 of 2007) as amended, requires kerbside household waste collectors to accept a minimum list of recyclable household waste materials. Collectors also may accept additional mixed dry recyclable household waste items.

Residual household kerbside waste, as defined in the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, (S.I. 820 of 2007) as amended, which is not food waste or recyclable household waste, should be placed in the residual bin.

All Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and waste batteries must be recycled and should not be placed in any household wheellie bins. WEEE is taken back free of charge in electrical retail stores on a one-for-one, like-for-like basis while waste batteries are taken back free of charge in all stores selling batteries with no obligation to make a purchase when returning old batteries. Each local authority also accepts household WEEE and small batteries free of charge at its recycling facilities.

Hazardous waste items should not be presented with normal household waste, i.e. in the mixed black bin waste for collection. Instead, hazardous waste should be separated at source (in the home) and brought to local authority recycling facilities for safe disposal.

The Regional Waste Management Planning Offices (RWMPOs) are running a comprehensive ongoing waste campaign in 2017. This campaign includes a programme of education and awareness using radio and cinema advertisements to encourage the use of brown bin and focusing on food waste prevention, backed up with social media campaigns; the development of a master recycling programme by the RWMPOs, working with the environmental pillar, to roll out workshops across the country training recycling ambassadors to bring the recycling

message and understanding to a wide variety of communities; and, a billboard campaign to promote the prevention, reduction, reuse and recycling of waste. The Department is also running a campaign on the phasing out of flat fee charges for household waste collection. The Department and the RWMPOs will assist households on how they can reduce and control their own domestic waste costs while preventing the creation of greater waste problems for future generations; further details available at:

www.southernwasteregion.ie

www.emwr.ie

www.curwmo.ie

Waste Disposal Charges

1444. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if colostomy bags can be considered as part of the annual support for waste charges of €75 for persons with lifelong and long-term medical incontinence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37770/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): An annual support of €75 will be introduced for persons with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence. This will help people meet the average annual cost of the disposal of medical incontinence pads. The details and arrangements of this support will be finalised later this year, after further consultation with the stakeholder groups.

Offshore Exploration

1445. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which the granting of an offshore oil exploration licence for a company (details supplied) is compliant with his commitment to take action in reducing carbon emissions and taking action to prevent climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37784/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Kyne): Four commercial gas discoveries and no commercial oil discoveries have been made since exploration began in the Irish Offshore. The Irish Atlantic Margin remains substantively underexplored and its actual potential will not be known without a significant increase in the level of exploration and in particular exploration drilling.

The Energy White Paper “Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030” sets out a vision and framework to guide Irish energy policy and the actions that Government intends to take in the energy sector from now up to 2030, aimed at transforming Ireland’s fossil-fuel based energy sector into a clean, low carbon system by 2050. This ambitious vision for Ireland’s energy system envisages a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from that sector by 80-95% relative to 1990 levels by 2050. The White Paper identifies the long-term strategic importance of diversifying Ireland’s energy generation portfolio and largely decarbonising the energy sector by 2050.

Ireland’s transition to a low carbon energy future will involve progressively moving to lower emissions fuels e.g. moving initially from peat and coal to natural gas, and ultimately towards an even greater reliance on renewable energy. In that regard, the Government has

introduced a range of policy measures and schemes to incentivise the use of renewable energy and deliver energy efficiency.

The White Paper recognises that oil and natural gas will remain significant elements of Ireland's energy supply in the transition period.

Ireland currently sources all its oil from abroad. Ireland sources its gas supply from the Kinsale fields (Kinsale, Ballycotton and Seven Heads), the Corrib field and the gas pipeline from Moffat in Scotland. Corrib and Kinsale are not in a position to meet all of Ireland's annual gas demand and so Ireland will continue to rely on gas via the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future. The Kinsale fields are expected to cease production by 2021 while Corrib production is projected to decrease to 50 per cent of its initial levels by 2025.

Taking this into account, successful exploration in Ireland's Atlantic Margin has the potential to deliver significant and sustained benefits to Irish society and the economy, particularly in terms of enhanced security of supply and import substitution.

Waste Disposal Charges

1446. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when household waste collection providers will be able to introduce the new pricing arrangements for household waste collections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37799/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The charges applied by waste management companies are matters for those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

In the interest of encouraging further waste prevention, the Government decided that flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection will be phased out over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018 as customers contracts come up for renewal and the necessary regulatory steps are being put in place to give effect to this decision.

As has been long-standing practice, a collection service provider may amend a pricing structure or a contract at any time, as long as the amendments are in accordance with all relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. It is worth noting that the measure to phase out flat fees 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-related fee.

Environmental Policy

1447. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37800/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I am not aware of any issue affecting petrol engines along the lines suggested by the Deputy. If the Deputy is in a position to provide further detailed information on this matter I will be happy to examine it.

Question No. 1448 answered with Question No. 1434.

Climate Change Policy

1449. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the national climate change dialogue will commence; his plans to start the dialogue after the Citizens' Assembly has concluded its deliberations on the topic of how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37893/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I was pleased to announce earlier this year that the Government was establishing a National Dialogue on Climate Action. This is in line with the commitment set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government. I subsequently announced, alongside my publication of the National Mitigation Plan on 19 July last, the establishment of an Advisory Group to provide me with advice in relation to the overall strategy, structure and operation of the National Dialogue. The Advisory Group held its first meeting in July.

The primary objective of the National Dialogue will be to ensure an inclusive process of engagement and consensus building across society towards enabling the transformation to a low carbon and climate-resilient future. To do this, the Dialogue will seek to create awareness, engagement and motivation to act (locally, regionally and nationally) in relation to the challenges presented by climate change and to establish, on a long-term basis, appropriate networks for people to meet periodically to consider evidence-based inputs on the economic, social, behavioural, environmental and public aspects of climate and energy policy.

National Dialogue initiatives already announced for 2017 include the Green Schools National Climate Change Action and Awareness Programme, incorporating Climate Action Week between 16 and 20 October and the Green Schools Climate Expo on 22 February 2018, and the Climate Ambassador Programme which is scheduled to be formally launched later this month.

I understand that the Citizens' Assembly will meet at the end of this month and again in November to consider the topic of how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change and that these sessions will be informed by a public consultation which took place in August. As part of its work, the Assembly will be also asked to consider how the National Dialogue on Climate Action should engage with the wider public to create awareness, engagement and motivation to act in relation to the challenges of climate change. I expect that this will provide a valuable base of evidence and ideas from which to draw on in the preparation of further activities under the National Dialogue in the coming months, including proposals for regional gatherings and local community conversations incorporating innovative consultation mechanisms.

Broadband Service Provision

1450. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will roll out in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37949/17]

1459. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if fibre broadband can be extended an extra 100 meters to service a school

(details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38159/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1450 and 1459 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

- The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

The position in relation to the areas referred to in the Question is as follows:

- the domestic premises falls within a LIGHT BLUE area on the Map and is covered by eir's planned rural fibre high speed broadband deployment. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

- the National School within the AMBER area and will be covered by the State intervention. With regard to the nearby eir rollout, details of the premises included in that rollout are a matter for the operator and my Department has no input in the process.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted by bidders later this month. The next stage of the procurement process is Final Tenders.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the rollout of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a Taskforce to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

Brexit Staff

1451. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37987/17]

1452. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if

there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38003/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1451 and 1452 together.

The Government's Brexit Contingency Framework set out that all Departments should identify a senior official to oversee Brexit matters and to create a Top Management sub-committee to deal specifically with the implications of Brexit for their areas of work.

My Department nominated the Assistant Secretary for Energy to take lead responsibility for Brexit matters. Under the chairmanship of this Assistant Secretary a sub-committee, consisting of Principal Officers representing policy areas with potential Brexit implications in my Department, was established.

This sub-committee has representatives from across the divisions of my Department, reflecting its broad remit. The sub-committee meets regularly to ensure that my Department is prepared for the possible implications of Brexit. I would also add that I as Minister participate in the Cabinet Committee structures dealing with Brexit issues and my Department is also represented on the Interdepartmental Brexit Group. This ensures a 'whole of Government' approach when dealing with Brexit.

Brexit is a standing item on the Agenda of my Department's Management Board which generally meets weekly and which is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department. It is also on the Agenda of my monthly meetings with the Management Board which examines progress on priority issues being addressed by the Department.

Energy has been identified as a key priority for my Department and Government in the Brexit negotiations. As a result, the Strategic Energy Policy Division - consisting of four staff - has taken a leading role in co-ordinating all Brexit work across my Department.

The work on Brexit to date has been funded from existing budgets including the All Island Brexit Civic Dialogue on Energy on 6 February in Boyle, Co. Roscommon, which had a total cost of €3,590.70. Planning is underway for a further Brexit Civic Dialogue later this year specifically for industry stakeholders. The costs will be met out of current budgets. Given the uncertainty in relation to Brexit, it is not practicable to provide an estimate of further future costs at this time.

Construction Costs

1453. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38019/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department does not currently engage directly in any construction projects and accordingly does not directly monitor construction inflation. In relation to other types of capital expenditure, all projects operate within agreed budgets and must adhere to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Public Spending Code. All procurements for capital projects in my Department must comply with National and EU procurement rules.

Community Banking

1454. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the work his Department has carried out in conjunction with An Post regarding the ongoing public banking investigation by the Department of Community and Rural Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38102/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I am responsible for the postal sector, including the governance of An Post, to ensure that the company is fully compliant with the code of practice and governance of State bodies and the governance functions included in the statutory framework underpinning An Post. Operational matters and the role of developing commercial strategies for the post office network are matters for the board and management of An Post. As Minister, I do not have a statutory function in respect of such matters. Consequently, measures to maintain, enhance and diversify the post office network are matters for An Post.

It is Government policy that An Post remains a strong, viable company in a position to provide a high quality, nationwide postal service and that it maintains a nationwide customer-focused network of post offices in the community. A fundamental review of An Post, including the post office network, which will identify the strategic changes and restructuring necessary to maintain the company on a sound financial footing is ongoing. All opportunities are being assessed by An Post in the context of the current strategic review.

The recommendations of the post office hub working group, which includes the community banking proposal, will continue to be finalised between both my Department and the Department of Community and Rural Development.

Inland Fisheries Ireland Funding

1455. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the additional resources that can be put in place to support Inland Fisheries Ireland in tackling river pollution events that kill fish similar to the incident that occurred in the River Tolka at Mulhuddart in July 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38103/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) has statutory responsibility for the conservation, protection, development and promotion of Ireland's inland fisheries resource, including sea angling.

An element of IFI's protection and conservation role include response to pollution incidents and fish kill events. IFI receives Exchequer allocations each year to support its wide range of functions. These allocations are not disaggregated between operational functions. The support of all functions is a day to day operational matter for the Board of IFI.

Pollution and fish kill events and their impacts vary greatly and issues such as the magnitude of the event and the relative health of fish stocks in the particular water body are key considerations in relation to potential interventions. In addition, IFI concentrates on prevention via information dissemination and education and as a matter of policy seeks to prosecute polluters.

Where it is notified of such events, IFI would immediately deploy resources to contain and assess the situation. Subsequent to immediate response, IFI assesses each individual incident to

consider what if any remedial interventions may be required and whether natural rehabilitation is the best solution to ensure genetic integrity of the stocks.

IFI considers that the Tolka and its fish stocks are particularly vulnerable to the impact of pollution and ensures a rapid response when incidents are reported in order to mitigate impacts

I am happy to advise the Deputy that, in relation to the fish kill incident on the River Tolka, IFI met with representatives from the local angling clubs last month to discuss matters following the incident and to identify any way IFI can help the remediate the impacts. It was agreed at the meeting that:

1. IFI will stock fish to the Tolka – this will likely happen in March 2018 ahead of the fishing season
2. IFI will support clubs for competitions and other community initiatives
3. IFI will support the call for mapping of pipes in the vicinity of the River

IFI is also investigating the possibility of working with the clubs involved, the Local Authority and other relevant agencies on the potential to develop a youth angling venue on the Tolka - similar to the Darndale Lake/Corkagh Park development.

Renewable Energy Generation

1456. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to allow excess solar energy generated through solar PV panels to be sold back to the grid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38108/17]

1460. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the actions and supports he plans to take to support the development of residential solar power; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38201/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1456 and 1460 together.

The 2016 Programme for Government and 2015 Energy White Paper recognise that Solar Photovoltaic (Solar PV) has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future and Solar PV has the potential to contribute to meeting Ireland's renewable energy and climate change objectives.

However, at present, Solar PV, for electricity generated and export to grid, is not supported under any of the existing renewable electricity support schemes operating in Ireland. This is largely down to the historic higher costs associated with Solar PV technologies in comparison to other renewable electricity generators.

My Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The design of the new scheme has included an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting Solar PV (both rooftop and ground mounted) and a range of other commercial renewable technologies, at various scales, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. The assessment also included analysis of the optimum financial support mechanisms for renewable technologies, in line with the 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines.

A public consultation on the design principles of the proposed new RESS was launched on 4 September and submissions are invited from the public. All submissions will be considered and following on from this final public consultation, a design proposal will be brought to Government for approval. Full details of the consultation are available on my Department's website at: www.dccae.gov.ie.

Micro generation of renewable electricity was appraised as part of the RESS economic assessment, including the use of solar PV panels on domestic rooftops. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before the introduction of a tariff for exported electricity from solar PV rooftop installations. These include among others, a reform of network charges, an assessment of the distributional impact of such a policy decision on the PSO (cost burden sharing), and development of a fair tariff for exported electricity taking the benefits of self-consumption into account. This approach is in line with experience from other EU member states who have attempted to introduce supports for micro generation.

I am committed to finding an appropriate mechanism for supporting micro generation, as I believe that micro-generation will have an important role in Ireland's transition to a carbon free economy, in assisting Ireland meet its renewable electricity targets, and increasing social acceptance of and promoting renewable energy projects.

I have asked the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) to facilitate a workshop on micro generation, and this will take place in October. All relevant stakeholders will be invited to participate with the end goal being the development of a policy position on how best to support micro generation in Ireland.

Public Services Card

1457. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38143/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There are no services operated by the Department that require a Public Services Card (PSC).

The information requested regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

1458. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will provide information on the roll-out of fibre broadband, with reference to a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38157/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to

date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

- The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

The premises referred to in the Question falls within the AMBER area on the High Speed Broadband Map and will be covered by the State intervention. With regard to the eir fibre roll-out, details of the premises included in that rollout are a matter for the operator and my Department has no input in the process.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with “Detailed Solutions” to be submitted by bidders later this month. The next stage of the procurement process is Final Tenders.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the rollout of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a Taskforce to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

Question No. 1459 answered with Question No. 1450.

Question No. 1460 answered with Question No. 1456.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

1461. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the annual percentage of staff of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38358/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

Broadband Service Provision

1462. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises and households in County Louth that have access to

broadband. [38373/17]

1463. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises and households in County Louth that will be covered by an agreement with a company (details supplied); and the timeframe for this process to be concluded. [38374/17]

1464. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises and households in County Louth that will remain without broadband by the end of a contract with a company (details supplied); and the timeframe for these premises and households to receive broadband. [38375/17]

1465. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he expects the completion of the formal procurement process to select a company to roll out the broadband network within the State intervention area. [38376/17]

1466. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he expects the roll-out of the broadband network in the State intervention area to be completed. [38377/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1462 to 1466, inclusive, together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

- The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

Also in April, eir signed a agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period with an average of 500 premises passed per day.

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are published on my Department's website. The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

The Quarter 2 2017 position in relation to the County Louth is set out in the table:

County	Number of premises	AMBER premises State led Intervention area	BLUE premises commercial operators	Light BLUE planned rural deployment by eir
Louth	60,055	8,526	47,374	4,155

A full set of county statistics are available at www.broadband.gov.ie.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with “Detailed Solutions” to be submitted by bidders later this month.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a task force to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

Departmental Staff Data

1467. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years from 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38381/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

Year	Percentage of Female Staff
2010	51%
2011	52%
2012	52%
2013	53%
2014	54%
2015	51%
2016	49%
2017 to date	48%

EU Conventions

1468. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the findings of the Aarhus Convention compliance committee; if his Department’s officials attending the meeting will be speaking in support of these findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38398/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I note the findings and recommendations adopted by the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee on 19 June 2017, with regard to communications ACCC/C/2013/91 and

ACCC/C/2013/92, concerning compliance by the United Kingdom and Germany with their obligations under the Aarhus Convention in relation to public participation in the transboundary environmental impact assessment procedure for two nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point in the United Kingdom. The findings and recommendations were concluded in accordance with defined procedures and international law under the Aarhus Convention and, as part of that process, parties concerned are entitled to submit comments on the draft findings and to challenge issues of fact. Ireland is not a party to these proceedings and, therefore, does not have a role in affirming or disputing the findings of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. Officials from my Department will attend the meeting of the Aarhus Committee next week and will note the discussions on this matter

Electric Vehicles

1469. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the process and timeframe for a decision on the future ownership of the electric vehicle network here. [38520/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In March 2014, the Commission for Energy Regulation approved the delivery of Electric Vehicle public and domestic recharging infrastructure by ESB Networks on a pilot basis. In October 2016, the Commission for Energy Regulation published a consultation paper seeking views on the future ownership of the recharging infrastructure. A final decision in relation to this consultation is a matter for the Commission for Energy Regulation. I understand that they are currently considering the matter and a decision is expected shortly.

The Low Emissions Vehicle Taskforce, which is co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is considering the range of measures and options available to Government for the purpose of accelerating the deployment of low carbon transport technologies, including Electric Vehicles, in line with the Programme for Government commitment. Subsequent to the decision from the Commission for Energy Regulation, the task force will assess its implications when examining the future requirements for Electric Vehicle recharging infrastructure.

Internet Safety

1470. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a certification authority issuing secure certificates for Internet communication (details supplied); if that authority falls under the auspices of the State; if certificates are used to access State services; and if there is a certificate exchange with other European states to access citizen information. [38559/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): At present there is no Irish Company offering qualified X509 Certificates for e-signing. An X509 certificate can be obtained from a Certification Service Provider or Trust Service Provider in other countries. Certificates issued by a qualified entity in any EU country must be recognised and accepted for business in other EU countries.

Exploration Licences

1471. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a licence issued by his Department for exploration of fossil fuels has an automatic right to renewal; and if so, if such renewal is dependent on the discretion of his decision. [38565/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Licensing Terms for Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Development and Production 2007 provide for three categories of exploration licence, each comprising a number of distinct phases. Progression between phases or extension of the period of an existing phase is dependent upon fulfilment by the exploration licence holder of its existing phase work programme obligations; and consideration by my Department of the licence holder's proposed work programme for the next phase, and its capacity to undertake same. In that context, the Licensing Terms do not provide for the automatic renewal of an exploration licence.

Waste Management

1472. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the items that may be placed by persons in the black bin for household waste, brown bin for organic and food waste and green bin for recyclable material; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38577/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The European Union (Household Food Waste and Bio-waste) Regulations 2015, (S.I. 430 of 2015) are designed to promote the segregation and recovery of household food waste. Regulations 6 and 7 impose obligations on householders, which *inter alia*, require householders who avail of a household waste collection service, and are supplied with a food waste bin in line with the Regulations, to place food waste in the food waste bin. Alternatively, a householder may subject the food waste to a home composting process or bring the food to an appropriate authorised waste facility. A collector may also offer a service to collect garden and/or other suitable bio-waste in the food waste bin. Further information is available to download at <http://www.brownbins.ie/>.

The Seventh Schedule to the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, (S.I. 820 of 2007) as amended, requires kerbside household waste collectors to accept a minimum list of recyclable household waste materials. Collectors also may accept additional mixed dry recyclable household waste items.

Residual household kerbside waste, as defined in the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations 2007, (S.I. 820 of 2007) as amended, which is not food waste or recyclable household waste, should be placed in the residual bin.

A campaign developed by the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices focusing on reducing food waste generation and also encouraging the use of brown bin was run in March and August of 2017, comprising of radio and cinema advertisements and backed up by a social media campaign. Further campaigns are being rolled out over the second half of 2017 to assist householders to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste.

Brexit Issues

1473. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Ac-

tion and Environment the potential impact of Brexit on the roll-out of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38665/17]

1474. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the meetings which have taken place with Northern Ireland officials regarding the impact of Brexit in 2017; the planned meetings regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38666/17]

1476. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38689/17]

1477. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38705/17]

1478. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38721/17]

1479. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit [38737/17]

1480. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38753/17]

1481. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38769/17]

1482. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38801/17]

1483. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38817/17]

1484. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38833/17]

1485. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38849/17]

1486. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by his department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38881/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis

Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1473 and 1474, and Questions Nos. 1476 to 1486, inclusive, together.

The comprehensive document “Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union: The Government’s Approach” published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a co-ordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

My Department nominated the Assistant Secretary for Energy to take lead responsibility for Brexit matters. Under the chairmanship of this Assistant Secretary, a sub-committee, consisting of Principal Officers representing policy areas with potential Brexit implications in my Department, has been convened.

This sub-committee has representatives from the divisions of my Department, reflecting its broad remit. The sub-committee meets regularly to ensure that my Department is prepared for the possible implications of Brexit. I would also add that I as Minister participate in the Cabinet committee on Brexit and my Department is also represented on the Interdepartmental Brexit Group. This ensures a ‘whole of Government’ approach when dealing with Brexit.

Brexit is a standing item on the Agenda of my Department’s Management Board which generally meets weekly and which is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department. It is also on the Agenda of my monthly meetings with the Management Board which examines progress on priority issues being addressed by the Department.

Officials from my Department discuss the potential impacts of Brexit on the Irish energy sector at meetings with their EU and UK counterparts, including officials from the UK’s Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Exiting the European Union.

The Government’s National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

It is not possible at this stage to say with certainty what impact the UK leaving the EU will have on sectors including energy and broadband. This will be largely dependent on the shape of the future relationship between the EU and UK. The UK has not yet indicated its position on the future relationship, nor has the stage been reached in the UK/EU negotiations for discussion of future trade issues. Accordingly it is not yet possible to provide a detailed assessment. However officials are working on assessing the potential ramifications of the various potential outcomes.

As set out in the comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government’s continuing work to ensure that Ireland’s interests are reflected in the EU’s approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland’s strategic response to Brexit.

My Department has identified energy as the highest priority sector and has published on its website a summary of Brexit energy priorities. (<http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Brexit%20and%20the%20Irish%20Energy%20Sector.pdf>). However, there have also been a number of other papers and reports published on these issues, including by the ESRI and IBEC.

Principal amongst these issues identified in my Department's paper are maintenance of secure energy trading between the UK and EU Member States and maintaining the Single Electricity Market across the island of Ireland. The focus of my Department is on seeking to identify the risks and opportunities that may emerge as a result of Brexit and to develop appropriate strategies for these.

As regards stakeholder engagement, my Department held a very successful public All Island Brexit Civic Dialogue on Energy on 6 February in Boyle, Co. Roscommon. A further Civic Dialogue to address the concerns of the energy industry is planned before the end of the year. Further Civic Dialogues are to be considered. My Department has regular meetings with stakeholders across its remit, which afford it an opportunity for intelligence gathering and discussion of issues stakeholders identify in relation to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

In relation to Northern Ireland, the All-island Energy Market Joint Steering Group comprises senior officials from my Department, the Department of Economy – Northern Ireland, the Commission for Energy Regulation and the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland. It meets on a quarterly basis.

Two papers outlining Ireland's energy priorities were submitted to Task Force 50, the Brexit EU negotiating team. Senior officials in relevant divisions of my Department prepared a paper detailing Brexit's main impacts, with recommendations, to provide a comprehensive overview of sectoral issues faced within the Department.

Energy has been identified as a key priority for my Department and Government in the Brexit negotiations and as a result, the Strategic Energy Policy Division - consisting of four

staff - has taken a leading role in coordinating all Brexit work across my Department. There is one vacancy in this division which it is hoped will be filled shortly.

All costs relating to Brexit activities in my Department are met by existing budgets.

Research concerning “Cyber Security and Infrastructural Interdependencies” was completed for my Department in June of this year. For confidentiality purposes this research will not be published. Independent research specific to energy has been published, though not commissioned by the Minister.

In June of this year the National Broadband Plan Division engaged external consultants to consider “the potential implications of Brexit on the National Broadband Plan”. The Department has not yet received the final report from the consultants. It is not yet possible to say what impact Brexit will have on the rollout of the National Broadband Plan. In September 2015, the Government published its 6 year Capital Plan, Building on Recovery, which included an allocation of €275m for the National Broadband Plan. This will provide the initial stimulus required to deliver the Government’s intervention and it is expected that further funding will be available over the lifetime of any contract(s). Funding of €75m is committed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); State expenditure of €150m is required before the €75m under the European Regional Development Fund can be drawn down.

I can assure the Deputy that Ireland’s absolute preference is to maintain the closest possible trading relationship based on a level playing field between the UK and the EU, including Ireland. Government is clear that Ireland’s economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

1475. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on a company’s (details supplied) delivery of its concession agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38668/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government’s National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April, eir signed a agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period with an average of 500 premises passed per day.

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are published on my Department’s website and a full set of county statistics are available at www.broadband.gov.ie The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

In the period from December 2016 to the end of June 2017 a total of 70,324 premises were passed and 6,122 connections were made under eir’s rural deployment.

Questions Nos. 1476 to 1486, inclusive, answered with Question No. 1473.

Departmental Expenditure

1487. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38897/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report sets out the pre-Budget expenditure ceiling for my Department of €357 million for current expenditure and €201 million for capital expenditure. This represents the spending baseline for examination of my Department's budgetary priorities for 2018.

As outlined in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, the increases planned in expenditure for the delivery of public services are set at sustainable levels in order to ensure that the resources allocated are affordable both now and in the future. Consequently, it is important that there is an ongoing focus on the totality of Departmental spending and not just the incremental increase each year.

This was the context for this year's Spending Review which will support the consideration of existing expenditure alongside budgetary proposals during the Budget Estimates process. Where any savings are identified during the Estimates process they can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space. Work is ongoing in this regard.

Commercial Property

1488. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review submissions made to the Committee of Public Accounts relevant to a company (details supplied); the way in which the company was treated by a company; if he will investigate the complaints made and the inaction of a company; if he will confirm the sales price of the property concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37432/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This matter relates to a sale transaction dispute with Shannon Development dating back to 2011. This began before the establishment of Shannon Group which now includes the former Shannon Development property portfolio within its subsidiary Shannon Commercial Enterprises.

I am aware of the process undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee in reviewing this dispute and the conclusions reached by them. I am also aware of the response provided by Shannon Commercial Enterprises on the issues raised by the Committee. However, this is a commercial matter in which I have no function.

Departmental Funding

1489. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of extra funding that was made available to Donegal County Council to enable repair work on roads, bridges and so on in the aftermath of flooding in County Donegal during the week of 22 August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37783/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and

maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Following the flooding, Donegal County Council undertook the necessary immediate remedial works on the road network before completing an assessment of the overall cost of repairing the damage. The Council wrote to my Department on 7th September outlining its assessment of the costs involved in repairing the road network. My Department is liaising with the Council and has asked the Council to provide a breakdown of estimated costs between this year and next year.

Driver Licence Applications

1490. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Irish citizens residing abroad must acquire the new public services card to renew a driving licence; if so, the location in which they can apply for a public services card while residing in another country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37868/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under EU law, Member States may issue driving licences only to people whose normal residence is within their jurisdiction. When someone takes up residence abroad we therefore cannot issue or renew a driving licence for them.

The EU definition of 'normal residence' allows that a person may remain normally resident in a country while temporarily living outside that country for a fixed period of work or study. In these cases, Irish law currently allows people to apply by post rather than appearing in person at an office of the National Driver Licensing Service.

There is no requirement to produce a Public Services Card (PSC) as part of the driver licensing application process. However, under the Government's eGovernment strategy, a target of March 2018 has been set for the introduction of an online driving application system. When this is in place it will be necessary for those using the online system to register for a PSC in order to ensure validation of their identity. The postal option for people temporarily abroad will continue.

Air Ambulance Service

1491. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the changes being made to the role of the Coast Guard in view of the fact that search and rescue pilots on 24-hour duty will no longer be expected to undertake inter-hospital patient transfers; the alternative procedures being put in place to provide air transport for patient transfers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38259/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The provision of Air Ambulance/Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (AA/HEMS) is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive through the National Ambulance Service. The role of the Coast Guard in the provision of a HEMS service has been and will remain a secondary role to the primary SAR function and is provided on "as available" basis. Following a recent review by the Irish Aviation Authority in relation to arrangements for HEMS/AA, the Canadian Helicopter Corporation Ireland, the contractors for the Coast Guard Helicopter Service, were informed

that such services must operate under Civil Air Transport rules (AA/HEMS) rules with effect from the 6th of Sept. This essentially imposes more restrictive rules in relation to rest times and rostering in carrying out this type of work as opposed to maritime SAR services which are provided within a 24 hour roster.

The Department of Health and NAS have been advised on the impact of these changes with regard to provision HEMS/air Ambulance services.

Rail Services Data

1492. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of money Irish Rail has spent on the new seat reservation system; the improved customer service and value for money that has been brought about by this new system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36794/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if the Deputy does not receive a response within ten working days.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1493. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons waiting for their practical driving tests as of 24 July 2017, by county; and the waiting times for same, in tabular form. [36862/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Driver Test Data

1494. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons waiting for their practical driving tests in July 2015, by county; and the waiting time for same, in tabular form. [36863/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a reply has not been received within ten days.

Taxi Regulations

1495. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if taxi drivers are entitled to remove the Transport for Ireland taxi decal during periods when their vehicles are not used as taxis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36894/17]

1496. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

if the National Transport Authority has the required permission from every taxi driver for the public display of information supplied on the Transport for Ireland online taxi application form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36895/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1495 and 1496 together.

The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including vehicle signage and all licencing requirements, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if the Deputy does not receive a response within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

1497. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 791 of 7 March 2017, if the vacancies referred to have been filled; if not, the reason for the delay in the appointments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36896/17]

1498. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 791 of 7 March 2017, the steps he will take to rectify the lack of balance (details supplied) on the Taxi Advisory Committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36897/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1497 and 1498 together.

The Taxi Regulation Act 2013 provides that the Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC) shall consist of a Chairperson and 17 ordinary members. The 2013 Act also sets out requirements with regard to categories of representation.

Three of the four vacancies to which you referred have since been filled. These positions were under the 'special interest or expertise' category. The applications for these positions were submitted through the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and the positions were fulfilled in line with the new State Appointments Procedures.

In appointing members to the Committee, every effort is made, insofar as is practicable, to ensure that there is both rural and urban representation in the composition of the Committee in line with the 2013 Act.

Section 72 of that Act provides that appointments are for a period not exceeding 3 years. As the membership of the previous TAC expired on 31 July 2015, the existing TAC members have either been appointed or re-appointed until 31 July 2018.

Accordingly, the process to appoint new members will begin shortly and will take into account, insofar as is practicable, the requirements on diversity of membership under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

Parking Regulations

1499. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review the disabled parking permit scheme and include autism as a basis for qualification for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36904/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Disabled Parking Permit (also known as European Parking Card or Disabled Parking Badge) is available to people living in Ireland with a permanent disability, medical condition, severe mobility difficulties and to people who are registered blind. The medical criteria for issue of the permit are strict and only persons whose mobility is severely and permanently restricted qualify. These criteria were revised and clarified in my Department's Review of the Disabled Parking Scheme in 2010. The review recommended revising the eligibility criteria for the disabled parking permit to focus on limitations on mobility rather than on diagnosis of particular medical condition or illness. This was in line with the original intention of the scheme.

The disabled parking scheme is operated on behalf of my Department by the Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland (DDAI) and the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), which are the two bodies empowered to issue disabled parking permits. As Minister, I have responsibility for the regulations under which the scheme operates.

I have no plans to review eligibility criteria at this time. However, should the key stakeholders, in particular the DDAI and/or the IWA, present a case for a further review of the scheme - or indeed specific aspects of it, I would be willing to give consideration to it.

Traffic Management

1500. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason funding for the Kildare town traffic plan has been reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36920/17]

1501. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the traffic plan development funding being made available for towns in south County Kildare. [36921/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1500 and 1501 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the administration of the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme. This rolling programme of measures facilitates investment in various QBCs, cycling/walking, safety and traffic management projects throughout the seven local authority areas in the Greater Dublin Area, including Kildare County Council.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for the STMG Programme, I have referred your question to the Authority for a more detailed reply in relation to traffic management projects in Kildare. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Departmental Staff Data

1502. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work in his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and

job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36961/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of political staff employed in my Department in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017 is as outlined in the following table. Please note that my Department had both a Minister and Minister of State for each of the years in question.

The Deputy should also note that with effect from the 31st March 2016, on the instructions of the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, responsibility for Personal Assistants and Personal Secretaries was transferred to the Oireachtas.

Year	Job Title	Duty	Salary
2015	Personal Assistant x 2	Provide a role assigned by the Minister	€43,715 to €56,060
	Personal Secretary x 2	Provide a role assigned by the Minister	€456.50 to €915.20 per week
	Special Adviser x 2	Advise the Minister regarding political and departmental issues	€79,401 to €91,624 (one pro bono)
	Press Adviser x 1	Advise the Minister regarding political and departmental press issues	€79,401 to €91,624
	Civilian Driver x 4	Driving duties for the Minister	€34,700
Year	Job Title	Duty	Salary
2016	Personal Assistant x 2	Provide a role assigned by the Minister	€43,715 to €56,060
	Personal Secretary x 2	Provide a role assigned by the Minister	€456.50 to €915.20 per week
	Special Adviser x 1	Advise the Minister regarding political and departmental issues	€79,401 to €91,624
	Press Adviser x 1	Advise the Minister regarding political and departmental press issues	€79,401 to €91,624
	Civilian Driver x 3	Driving duties for the Minister	€34,700
	Seconded Public Servant x 1	Provide clerical assistance in Constituency office	€26,756 to €43,889

Year	Job Title	Duty	Salary
2017	Special Adviser x 1	Advise the Minister regarding political and departmental issues	€81,767 to €94,624
	Press Adviser x 1	Advise the Minister regarding political and departmental press issues	€81,767 to €94,624
	Civilian Driver x 3 (1 post covered by 2 work sharers)	Driving duties for the Minister	€35,700
	Clerical x 1 (1 post covered by 2 work sharers)	Provide clerical assistance in Constituency office	€438.46 to €734.79 per week

Capital Investment Plan

1503. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will include a road (details supplied) in the capital investment plan for 2016 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36964/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, while I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as a link road between Castlough on the N71 and Lissivigeen on the N22) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

The Capital Plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. Maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work with a further €600 million allocated for implementation of the PPP road programme which is already underway. In this context it was not possible to include a range of projects in the Plan (including the link road between Castlough on the N71 and Lissivigeen on the N22) given the overall funding envelope available.

The Capital Review is now underway and while there is a strong case for additional funding for the transport sector, there are a multitude of possible national, regional and local projects around the country, the cost of which far exceed available funding and unfortunately, this means that only a limited number can be put forward for funding.

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

Notwithstanding the above I have also referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. If you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please notify my Office.

Rail Passengers Data

1504. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passenger journeys undertaken on the DART in each of the years 2005 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017. [36996/17]

1505. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passenger journeys undertaken on Irish Rail's northern commuter service for Dundalk and Drogheda to Dublin in each of the years 2005 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017. [36997/17]

1506. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passenger journeys undertaken on Irish Rail's Dublin to Maynooth commuter service in each of the years 2005 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017. [36998/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1504 to 1506, inclusive, together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the collection and publication of statistics relating to public transport and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects Status

1507. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 242 of 10 May 2017, when a decision will be made on the priority ranking; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37016/17]

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

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Test

1508. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding a driving test for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37024/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Light Rail Projects

1509. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the decision was made not to install batteries on Luas trams in an effort to curb the use of overhead cables; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37026/17]

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

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this 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 reply within 10 working days.

Tourism Policy

1510. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to bid to host a round of a competition (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37027/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects or events. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland's Event Ireland Team is tasked with identifying, bidding for and winning sporting, cultural and other events for Ireland in partnership with relevant stakeholders. They offer a range of practical and financial supports to assist with bid proposals, subject to eligibility criteria, such as the delivery of overseas visitors to Ireland, the securing of private sector investment in the bid, and demonstration of significant economic impact for the event location/region.

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

Immigration Policy

1511. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether the detention of tourists at Dublin Airport will have a negative impact on the international view of Ireland as a tourist destination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37028/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Minister for Justice and Equality is responsible for immigration and border controls at our ports and airports. Such controls are a necessary and accepted feature of modern-day travel and I am not aware that the operation of these controls in Ireland is having a negative impact on Ireland's reputation as a tourism destination. It is my understanding that the Irish immigration system is one of the least burdensome for visitors. Fáilte Ireland's 2016 survey of overseas visitors attitudes towards Ireland did not identify this as an issue for visitors to Ireland.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Funding

1512. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of funding provided to Transport Infrastructure Ireland in 2017 for resurfacing of the national road network; the priority list for resurfacing of the network as determined by TII, by area and year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37038/17]

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

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

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Traffic Calming Measures

1513. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding traffic calming measures in a village (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37049/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects (including traffic calming) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

1514. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the obligations that are on taxi drivers to accept payment by card or other non-cash methods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37053/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including fare payment methods, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have 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.

Departmental Staff Data

1515. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37076/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of men and women respectively employed in my Department is as outlined in the table as at 31 August 2017. As indicated the breakdown of the total headcount of 513 is 52% male and 48% female.

Men	Women
268	245

Departmental Staff Data

1516. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of men and women respectively in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [37087/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of men and women respectively that currently hold specific posts in my Department is as outlined in the table as at 31 August 2017.

Grade	Male	Female
Secretary General	1	0
Assistant Secretary	3	2
Principal Officer	12	10
Assistant Principal	20	29

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1517. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application for a sports capital grant by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37090/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Road Improvement Schemes

1518. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to upgrade a road (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37099/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and

maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Road Projects Status

1519. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will approve funding for the Macroom bypass (details supplied); if the project will be on the Government's revised capital projects list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37146/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

The Capital Plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022. The transport element of the Capital Plan does provide for some targeted investment in a number of new projects in the Munster region including the N22 Ballyvourney to Macroom scheme.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

1520. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding works which have been announced for a road (details supplied); the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37164/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Test

1521. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a driving retest can be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37165/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Brexit Issues

1522. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has examined the potential impact of Brexit on road hauliers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37190/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In the context of both the Irish road haulage sector and our wider economy, it is vital to minimise the impact of Brexit by maintaining close trade between the UK and Ireland, minimising regulatory burden for goods transiting the UK and pursuing trade and investment opportunities arising from Brexit. My Department's officials maintain a close, ongoing working relationship with their counterparts in the UK and Northern Ireland and will continue to regularly interact with them as the effects of Brexit develop to determine how these effects may be mitigated and to safeguard the interests of the Irish road transport sector. My officials also continue to liaise regularly with representatives of the Irish road haulage industry and will take account of their concerns in engaging with the UK authorities.

I can assure you that my Department's officials and I will continue to work with our UK and EU counterparts to advance Ireland's interests in this regard.

Olympic Games Ticketing Arrangements

1523. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the full cost of the non-statutory State inquiry report into the 2016 Rio Olympic Games ticket matter undertaken by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37207/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The cost of the Moran Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the receipt, distribution and sale of tickets for the Rio Olympic Games and ancillary matters is €312,765.

I consider that this expenditure represents extremely good value for the taxpayer. A number of important lessons have been learnt from the work of the Moran Inquiry, in particular the unacceptable prioritisation of commerce over competitors, the fact that Pro10 was a cover for THG, the de facto Authorised Ticket Reseller, and the chaotic nature of the service provided to athletes, their families and friends and also the general public. I fully share the Judge's conclusions regarding the lack of fitness for purpose of the service provided and the general absence of effective corporate governance procedures within the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI).

In relation to the non-statutory nature of the Inquiry, I am satisfied that this was the correct course of action to follow. Even if the statutory option had been taken, inevitably at a much higher cost to the taxpayer, there is no reason to believe that those parties that chose not to cooperate would have adopted a different position. The case for the non-statutory approach is also supported by the foreign locations of most of those parties, which would have presented inevitable practical implementation difficulties. Moreover, Judge Moran was given the freedom to escalate to a full Commission of Investigation and his decision not to recommend same is one

that I fully support.

In conclusion, the Moran Inquiry Report has performed the valuable service of shining a light on inappropriate behaviour with regard to ticket sales. It has achieved this objective in an efficient and effective manner. The commitment of the newly elected OCI Executive Board to undertake essential governance reforms is a most welcome development, which I believe will ensure a much improved climate for future Olympiad.

Departmental Banking

1524. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37229/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy will note the Department makes a large amount of important and necessary banking payments to individuals and organisations in all corners of the island of Ireland. These include the tourism bodies and other public bodies in sports and transport, sports capital grants, and major Public Transport projects as well as safety and regulatory programmes for the Irish Coastguard, Aviation and Maritime services.

Given the large volume of payments (in excess of 20,000 individual bank transactions per annum) made by this Department, the costs are extremely low and represent excellent value for money on behalf of the taxpayer as highlighted in the table below. The Department actively takes proactive steps to manage our banking transactions with the objective of reducing fees.

We are also participating on a working group on Financial Shared Services in further reducing bank costs in order to deliver a world class service as part of the current Civil Service renewal process.

Year	Ulster Bank(Euros)	Bank of Ireland(Euros)	Investec(Euros)
2012	1,731	0	121
2013	2,010	1,351	0
2014	1,950	17	0
2015	2,190	0	0
2016	2,419	369	0
2017 (Jan-June)	2,132	584	0

This Department also collects a number of payments in the course of its operations. Significant amounts of money are collected for the benefit of the Exchequer in the use of debit and credit card payment collection services. These Exchequer receipts are then used to provide vital public services and infrastructure.

In addition to outgoing payments the accounts above are used for certain of those payments receivable by this Department. However, the vast majority of payments receivable by this Department are related to online motor tax.

The Online Motor Tax service at www.motortax.ie incurs two types of fees, debit and credit card financial clearance charges to Realex Payments, and bank acquiring fees to Elavon. Both these services are provided under Office of Government Procurement (OGP) frameworks, and all agencies across the public service can avail of them.

The costs incurred by the Department's online motor tax service for both these services are set out below, for the periods requested. Just over €21m has been paid for the period 2012 to 2017 inclusive. In that same period, over €3.8b has been collected by the service, meaning the charges incurred are just a little over a half of one percent.

New contracts put in place for both services since 1 July 2016 have resulted in significant savings for the Department, over 25% for financial clearance charges, and over 30% for bank acquiring charges, both over a full year. Furthermore, it should be noted that some of the bank charges incurred by the Department for the online service would previously have been incurred by local authorities, where the motor tax transaction was processed by a motor tax office and where a credit/debit card was used.

This is a very efficient way of collecting motor tax that is due to the State and is also very convenient for taxpayers. Data revealed by a December 2016 special report by the C&AG (no.97) suggests that the cost of processing an online payment is around half that of a physical motor tax payment.

Year	Motor Tax collected (via Online Motor Tax Service) (€)	Amount Paid to Realex (€)	Amount Paid to Elavon (€)
2012	533,330,921	296,000	3,071,000
2013	605,798,031	333,000	3,352,000
2014	705,284,514	400,000	3,625,000
2015	745,914,522	441,000	3,912,000
2016	739,320,867	363,000	3,195,000
2017 (Jan to August)	522,661,937	216,000	1,909,000
Total	3,852,310,792	2,049,000	19,064,000

The Road Transport Operator Licensing Unit also collect fees related to the issuing of licenses. This is an important regulatory function and again the resources are used to support the Exchequer in defraying the costs of that service and related functions.

This particular online license fee payment service started in 2014, so there are no figures for previous years.

Between 2014 and November 2016 some fees were paid to the Local Government Management Agency; and from November 2016 to date, Realex has been paid for the service the LGMA had previously provided.

The contracts with Realex and Elavon are on similar terms to the contracts mentioned in the context of the motor tax online service. The volume of transactions in this case may be smaller but the comparative cost ratio helps to ensure that value for money in this operation is being achieved.

The figures shown below for annual fees income are for total income from both online and paper applications. It was not possible to present separate figures for fees collected online but you should note that online transactions account for approximately 60% of all applications.

Year	Road Transport Operator Licensing fees (total)€	Amount paid to LGMA (under contract effective April 2014 to October 2016)€	Amount Paid to Realex (under contract effective November 2016 to date)€	Amount Paid to Elavon€
2014	828,180.00	160.00	*****	4,826.89
2015	952,946.00	241.16	*****	9,273.76
2016	1,286,955.00	213.29	23.47	12,116.47
2017 (Jan to August)	824,514.00	*****	88.71	6,901.82
Total	3,892,595.00	614.45	112.18	33,118.94

Seirbhísí Iompair

1525. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** den an Aire Iompair, Turasóireachta agus Spóirt an mbeidh na ceanglais chéanna maidir leis an dátheangachas atá ar Bhus Átha Cliath ar chuideachta (sonraí tugtha) a bhfuiltear tar éis 10% de ghnó bus na cathrach a bhronnadh uirthi. [37260/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Is ábhar don Údarás Iompair Náisiúnta (UIN) an cheist a ardaíodh agus chuir mé ceist an Teachta ar aghaidh chuig an UIN le haghaidh freagra díreach. Tabhair comhairle do mo oifig phriobháideach mura bhfaighidh tú freagra laistigh de dheich lá oibre.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1526. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the average waiting time for applications for driving tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37301/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Driver Test Data

1527. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons that have applied for a driving test but have not yet been tested in County Tipperary by month for the past two years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37302/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

1528. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total number of tests completed by month in County Tipperary for the past two years; the number of fails monthly for the same period, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37303/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the question to the authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Driver Test Data

1529. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of test centres in County Tipperary; the number of testers in each centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37304/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1530. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37316/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on 24 February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1531. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37317/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were

received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1532. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by two groups (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37322/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1533. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant for a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37323/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1534. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter regarding a sports capital grant by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37324/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation.

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By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1535. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37325/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1536. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a club (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37404/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1537. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37405/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the

24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1538. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37409/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1539. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37410/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1540. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37411/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Bren-

dan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1541. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37412/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1542. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37413/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

National Driver Licensing Service

1543. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37416/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the

National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Local Improvement Scheme

1544. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reintroduce a specially dedicated local improvement scheme; his views on whether rural roads are in serious disrepair; his further views on whether the community involvement scheme is not adequate in comparison to the local improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37426/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position remains as outlined to the Deputy in response to questions Nos. 1539 and 1360 on 26 July 2017:

The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

I would like to explain that the difference between Local Improvement Schemes (LIS) and Community Involvement Schemes (CIS) is that the LIS relates to works on private roads while the CIS relates to works on lower trafficked public roads which might only be considered towards the end of a County Council's roads programme.

Maintenance of private laneways/roads not taken in charge by local authorities is the responsibility of the landowners concerned. Due to the major cutbacks in roads funding it was necessary for my Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities in respect of the LIS. The approved scheme remains intact and local authorities can use a proportion of their Discretionary Grant (15%) for LIS should they wish to do so.

While there is a modest increase in funding for roads this year, it will take some years yet under the Capital Plan to restore "steady state" funding levels for regional and local roads. The primary focus has to continue to be on the maintenance and renewal of public roads.

In light of the provision in the Programme for Government indicating that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding for Community Involvement and Local Improvement Schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once the planned Review of the Capital Plan is completed.

Mountain Rescue Service

1545. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount allocated to mountain rescue for expenses by his Department in each of the past ten years; the mountain rescue teams to which this was allocated broken down by team; the policy of his Department on providing adequate funding for overhead costs to all mountain rescue teams into the future; his plans to seek the transfer of responsibility for mountain rescue to the Department of Rural and Community Development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37467/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I enclose a table which

sets out the annual maintenance grant allocated to each Mountain Rescue Team by this Department for the past ten years. Mountain Rescue Ireland, the parent body for mountain rescue, also receives an annual development grant currently in the sum of €60,000. Funding needs will be kept under review by the Department. I have no plans to seek the transfer of responsibility for mountain rescue to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE GRANT - MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAMS

Mountain Rescue Teams	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Mountain Rescue Ireland	€28,137.72	€28,981.85	€28,981.85	€26,083.66	€18,520.00
Irish Cave Rescue Organisation	€28,137.72	€28,981.85	€28,981.85	€26,083.66	€18,520.00
Search and Rescue Dogs Association	€11,255.09	€11,592.74	€11,592.74	€10,433.46	€7,407.00
Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue	€22,510.18	€23,185.48	€23,185.48	€20,866.00	€14,815.00
Kerry Mountain Rescue	€22,510.18	€23,185.48	€23,185.48	€20,866.93	€14,815.00
Tramore Mountain Rescue	€5,627.54	€5,796.37	€5,796.37	€5,216.73	€3,704.00
South Eastern Mountain Rescue	€11,255.09	€11,592.74	€11,592.74	€10,433.46	€7,407.00
Dublin/Wicklow Mountain Rescue	€22,510.18	€23,185.48	€23,185.48	€20,866.93	€14,815.00
Donegal Mountain Rescue	€11,255.09	€11,592.74	€11,592.74	€10,433.46	€7,407.00
Galway Mountain Rescue	€11,255.09	€11,592.74	€11,592.74	€10,433.46	€7,407.00
Mayo Mountain Rescue	€11,255.09	€11,592.74	€11,592.74	€10,433.46	€7,407.00
Sligo/Leitrim Mountain Rescue	€11,255.09	€11,592.74	€11,592.74	€10,433.46	€7,407.00
Total Per Year	€196,964.06	€202,872.95	€202,872.95	€182,584.67	€129,631.00

Mountain Rescue Teams	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Mountain Rescue Ireland	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00
Irish Cave Rescue Organisation	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00	€18,520.00
Search and Rescue Dogs Association	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00

Questions - Written Answers

Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00
Kerry Mountain Rescue	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00
Tramore Mountain Rescue	€3,704.00	€3,704.00	€3,704.00	€3,704.00	€3,704.00	€3,704.00
South Eastern Mountain Rescue	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00
Dublin/Wicklow Mountain Rescue	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00	€14,815.00
Donegal Mountain Rescue	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00
Galway Mountain Rescue	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00
Mayo Mountain Rescue	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00
Sligo/Leitrim Mountain Rescue	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00	€7,407.00
Total Per Year	€129,631.00	€129,631.00	€129,631.00	€129,631.00	€129,631.00	€129,631.00

Sports Capital Programme Applications

1546. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital grant application by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37487/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on 24 February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Aviation Policy

1547. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider commissioning an aviation safety analysis regarding the consequences of locating a 320 acre solar farm between Dunboyne and Batterstown in County Meath (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37517/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Aviation

Authority (IAA) has statutory responsibility for aviation safety in Ireland under the provisions of the Irish Aviation Authority Act 1993. I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the IAA for direct response. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Road Projects

1548. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request that road markings (details supplied) on the N22 be repainted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37536/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as the N22) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rail Network

1549. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the existence of rail infrastructure, such as unused narrow gauge rail tracks, small locomotives and wagons, formerly used to transport peat on bogland; and if so, the scale of the unused rail infrastructure and the location of same. [37540/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have no responsibility for the rail infrastructure referred to by the Deputy. I understand that the rail infrastructure is operated by Bord na Móna which is under the remit of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Local Improvement Scheme Applications

1550. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a local funding scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37566/17]

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

Maintenance of private laneways/roads not taken in charge by local authorities is the responsibility of the landowners concerned. Due to the major cutbacks in roads funding it was necessary for my Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities in respect

of the LIS. The approved scheme remains intact and local authorities can use a proportion of their Discretionary Grant (15%) for LIS should they wish to do so.

While there is a modest increase in funding for roads this year, it will take some years yet under the Capital Plan to restore “steady state” funding levels for regional and local roads. The primary focus has to continue to be on the maintenance and renewal of public roads.

In light of the provision in the Programme for Government indicating that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding for Local Improvement Schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once the planned Review of the Capital Plan is completed.

Ports Policy

1551. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views regarding the recent decision of the Port of Cork to enter into a joint venture with a company (details supplied) to import liquefied natural gas extracted through fracking in the United States, in view of the recent ban on fracking here due to of the serious environmental damage caused by same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37610/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have no involvement in the business operations of the commercial port companies. Commercial decisions made by the Port of Cork are a matter for the company.

I have been informed by the Port of Cork that it is not currently entering into a joint venture with any company to import liquefied natural gas (LNG). The Port of Cork has, however, confirmed that it has entered into a Non Disclosure Agreement with NextDecade, a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) development company focused on LNG export projects in Texas in the United States, to explore the feasibility of importing LNG through FSRU (Floating Storage and Regasification Unit) technology into Cork Harbour.

The NextDecade-Inisfree LNG Project in Cork Harbour is envisioned as being based around a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU). The terminal would be capable of offloading LNG from a large range of LNG vessels in current operation. If constructed, the Project would substantially increase and diversify Ireland’s supply of natural gas.

The Port has also stated that it is by no means certain that most or all of the Project’s LNG will come from North America, nor is it reasonable to assert that the US gas that is produced and exported comes from production based on fracking technology. The Cork Harbour LNG Project would be capable of sourcing LNG from multiple countries and sources.

This proposed NextDecade LNG project will provide an LNG refuelling and bunkering facility for ships at the Port of Cork in the future which would meet the requirement under the EC Alternative Fuels Directive for TEN-T ports. This facility would also be able to provide competitive bunkering to all Irish Ports.

Visa Agreements

1552. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to hold meetings with the Minister for Justice and Equality regarding reviewing eligibility for tourism visas in view of Brexit. [37663/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ease of access is an important consideration for visitors from developing tourism markets. Tourism into Ireland has benefitted from initiatives such as the visa waiver scheme and the British Irish Visa Scheme. In respect of Brexit, one of the priorities from a tourism perspective is that joint visa arrangements with the UK are maintained. My Department has emphasised the importance of maintaining the existing arrangements at various formal inter-departmental groups and groups that include stakeholders from outside the public service. The visa arrangements matter has been discussed at the External Trade Council, the Cabinet Committee on BrExit, the BrExit Economy and Trade Work Group, the BrExit Common Travel Area Work Group as well as the Brexit Tourism Work Group. Officials from my Department and officials from the Department of Justice and Equality attend these fora.

As the Deputy is aware, eligibility for travel visas is the responsibility of the Minister for Justice and Equality. My officials are in regular contact with that Department in respect of visas from a tourism perspective. For example, in July, officials from my Department and Tourism Ireland attended a working group meeting on visas at the Department of Justice and Equality, with particular emphasis on visa arrangements for China. Further meetings of this Working Group are planned to discuss issues in respect of visas.

Ministerial Meetings

1553. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding the impacts of Brexit in the Border areas; and the date on which he met them. [37665/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have held a number of meetings with my EU and UK counterparts and the European Commissioner for Transport in relation to Brexit and the border. These meetings were very useful in promoting an understanding of transport Brexit-related implications for Ireland, including the impacts of Brexit on the border areas and the details are summarised below.

12/12/16 ?Minister Chris Hazzard, Minister for Infrastructure ?Northern Ireland Executive ?NS?MC matters and Brexit, including also the interdependencies of cross-border trade on the island of Ireland.

?04/04/17 ?Prof. Péter Balázs ?European Coordinator for the North Sea Med Corridor Connecting Europe Facility Core Corridor ?EU: European Commission ?Implications of Brexit on TEN-T (including border)

25/05/17 Minister Anna Johansson Minister for Infrastructure Sweden: Brexit, Road safety

26/05/17 Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling Secretary of State, Department for Transport: UK, Brexit

08/06/17 Commissioner Violeta Bulc European Commissioner for Transport EU: European Commission Brexit and European Issues

08/06/17 Jörg Leichtfried Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology, Austria: Brexit and Road Safety.

Road Projects Status

1554. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the sta-

tus of the Government's commitment to the A5 upgrade from Donegal, Derry, Tyrone and Monaghan as committed to in the St. Andrews Agreement; the progress made by his Department in the past year on this key infrastructure project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37666/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 project 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 process in the North has been concluded.

Road Projects Status

1555. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N2 Clontibret to the Border road scheme which is essential in view of the commitment to advance the A5 upgrade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37667/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (such as the N2) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Éireann Staff

1556. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of illness-related absences there have been in Bus Éireann in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area in the past year. [37668/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is an operational matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sport Ireland Funding

1557. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the allocation to Sport Ireland in 2016 and 2017; and the distribution of Sport Ireland funding to sports bodies in receipt of Sport Ireland funding in the same period, in tabular form. [37669/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Current Funding allocation to Sport Ireland (including Dormant Accounts current funding) in 2016 and 2017 is as follows:

2016: €50.968m

2017: €53.835m

Sport Ireland is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding to the National Governing Bodies of sport. I have therefore referred this aspect 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.

Tourism Ireland Funding

1558. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the allocation to Tourism Ireland in each of the years 2011 to 2016; the allocation for 2017; and the intended allocation for 2018. [37670/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The breakdown of the total Exchequer provision for tourism services, including Tourism Ireland, from my Department's vote, is available in the annual Revised Estimates Volume (REV) for Public Services, which is published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and available on that Department's website. Funding for 2018 is the subject of the annual estimates discussion with the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform and will be confirmed in the REV for 2018.

Local Improvement Scheme Expenditure

1559. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding expended on the local improvement scheme programme on an annual basis in each of the years 2010 to 2016; the associated number of projects supported in each of those years; the average payment made in each of those years; and the allocation for 2017. [37671/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Due to the major cutbacks in roads funding arising from the financial crisis, it was necessary for my Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities from 2012 in respect of the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS). Details of the allocations in respect of LIS made to local authorities for 2010 and 2011 are set out in the following table. The management of the Scheme, including the selection of projects for funding, is a matter for each local authority.

Year	Total LIS Allocation
2010	€4,904,338
2011	€4,808,855

No monies were provided by the Department for LIS in 2012.

Since 2013, while there is no separate allocation for LIS, the allocation of funding for LIS has been devolved to local authorities, who can use a proportion of their Discretionary grant funding for LIS should they wish to do so. The allowable proportion of Discretionary Grant was 7% in 2013 and this was increased to 15% from 2014 onwards.

Details of the regional and local road grant payments to County Councils in the period 2010-2016 are outlined in the regional and local road grant payment booklets which are available in the Dáil Library. Details of the 2017 regional and local road grant allocations to each

County Council are also available in the Dáil library.

In light of the provision in the Programme for Government indicating that, as the economy recovers, the Government will promote increased funding for Community Involvement and Local Improvement Schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once the planned Review of the Capital Plan is completed.

Road Projects Expenditure

1560. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the allocation for the upgrade and maintenance of regional and secondary roads in each of the years 2006 to 2017. [37672/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regional and local road grant allocations and payments made to local authorities in the period 2006 to 2016 are included in the allocation and payment booklets available to Deputies in the Dáil library. The 2017 allocation booklet is also included.

Cycling Facilities Funding

1561. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the annual allocation for public cycle lanes in each of the years 2006 to 2017; and the details of maintenance on existing cycle lanes and expenditure on new cycle lanes for each of those years. [37673/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The numbers cycling have increased year on year, with the recent Census showing a 43% increase in the numbers cycling to work.

I believe that the time has come for a step change in the level of investment in cycling infrastructure, as this will allow us to further increase the numbers cycling thereby easing congestion, improving public health and enhancing the liveability of our cities.

To achieve this, I will be proposing a significant package of increased investment in cycling infrastructure, to be targeted primarily on investment in segregated radial routes in the GDA and the Regional Cities. The package, if approved, will have a transformative effect on our cities over the next five years.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities for the administration of the Sustainable Transport Management Grant and Regional Cities Programmes, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply in relation to funding provided for cycling under those programmes. In relation to the funding provided directly by my Department for cycling under the Smarter Travel Programme, the information requested by the Deputy is being collated at present and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible. If the Deputy does not receive a full response within 10 working days, please contact my private office.

Public Service Obligation Data

1562. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the public service obligation in each of the years 2011 to 2017; and the intended allocation for

2018, in tabular form. [37675/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware the allocation for Public Service Obligation (PSO) public transport services is subject to the annual Budgetary process and as such future allocations are yet to be determined. I will of course be engaging with my Ministerial colleagues as Budget 2018 is developed and the PSO subvention programme will obviously form part of that engagement.

Since 2010 the award and subvention of PSO contracts falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA), which has direct responsibility for this area along with the routes covered. The NTA publishes details of PSO subsidy levels through its statistical bulletins available on its website *www.nationaltransport.ie*

In addition, the issue of PSO funding for public transport was selected this year by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of its Spending Review analysis of priority areas of expenditure. The published paper contains details of PSO subsidy levels since 2001 and is available to view at <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/spending-review/>

Public Service Obligation Data

1563. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the public service obligation in each of the years 2011 to 2017 for CIÉ recipients, Dublin Bus, Iarnród Éireann and Bus Éireann, in tabular form; and the intended allocation for 2018. [37676/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware the allocation for Public Service Obligation (PSO) public transport services is subject to the annual Budgetary process and as such future allocations are yet to be determined. I will of course be engaging with my Ministerial colleagues as Budget 2018 is developed and the PSO subvention programme will obviously form part of that engagement.

Since 2010 the award and subvention of PSO contracts falls under the independent statutory remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA), which has direct responsibility for this area along with the routes covered. The amount of PSO subsidy awarded to each operator is comprehensively detailed in the NTA's Statistical Bulletin Number 02/2017 entitled Bus and Rail Statistics for Ireland – State Funded Services which is available to view on their website *www.nationaltransport.ie*

Sport Ireland Funding

1564. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the Exchequer funding provided to the GAA in each of the years 2008 to 2017 inclusive. [37677/17]

1565. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the Exchequer funding provided to the FAI in each of the years 2008 to 2017 inclusive. [37678/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1564 and 1565 together.

Sport Ireland replaced the Irish Sports Council and the National Sport Campus Development Authority on 1 Oct 2015. Sport Ireland (and previously the Irish Sports Council) is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport and the allocation of grant funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport, including the FAI

and the GAA. I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for direct response. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

In addition, both the FAI and the GAA would have benefitted from funding under the Sports Capital Programme for the period in question. Details of all allocations and grant payments under the Sports Capital Programme are available on my Department's website. Payments made in 2017 will be published early in the new year.

Sports Capital Programme Expenditure

1566. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the allocation made to the sports capital grant scheme in each of the years 2008 to 2017 inclusive; the details of the distribution and associated allocation to sports bodies in 2016 and 2017. [37679/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all of the allocations and payments under the Sports Capital Programme for the period referred to by the Deputy are published on the Department's website: <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-awards-new>

Driver Licence Renewals

1567. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the renewal of driver licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37682/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There is no policy change involved.

When the National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS) was introduced in 2013, it was intended that an online renewal system would be available within 12 to 18 months. It would then have followed that people who had already had their photo captured at an NDLS centre would not need to appear in person at a centre again.

The online application will now be introduced next year in two phases, with the first targeted for March 2018.

Driving licences are issued for periods of 10 years, 5 years, 3 years, or 1 year. A person who had their photo captured at an NDLS centre for a 10- or 5-year licence will not come up for renewal before the online system is available (the NDLS centres went live in October 2013). I understand from the RSA that there is a postal renewal facility for people who have a 1-year licence, but that regrettably there are logistical difficulties with extending this to people with a 3-year licence, the period to which the Deputy refers.

Road Projects

1568. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide a crash barrier on a dangerous section of the road (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37700/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand that the section of road referred to by the Deputy is at a junction on the N22.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. This also applies to the maintenance and management of national roads. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme

1569. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date the sports capital grant funding will be announced. [37765/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in the coming weeks.

Road Traffic Legislation

1570. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider allowing hearses and mourning cars drive in bus lanes when conveying bereaved family members to and from the church and to the graveyard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37778/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Bus lanes were created, at some expense to the public, to provide on-street priority to bus-based public transport. The goal is to make bus services faster and more reliable, thereby attracting more people onto public transport, and reducing congestion and pollution.

Since the introduction of bus lanes, there have been numerous and repeated requests to my Department to allow different classes of vehicle to have access to the lanes. My predecessors and I have always rejected these requests. The reason is that allowing further classes of vehicle to use the lanes would undermine their efficiency for the purpose for which they were created. In addition, granting any one such request would make it more difficult to argue for rejecting the others, and cause further damage to the efficiency of the lanes. I therefore have no plans to extend the use of bus lanes to any further vehicles at this time.

Driver Licence Applications

1571. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department directed the Road Safety Authority to accept the public services card as the only form of identity for those obtaining driving licences and sitting driving tests. [37793/17]

1572. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if driving licences issued by the Road Safety Authority can be used to verify the identity of persons sitting the Road Safety Authority's driving test to obtain a driving licence issued by same. [37794/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1571 and 1572 together.

The Public Services Card (PSC) is not at present required as part of the application process for a driving licence or the application process for a driving test.

It is a matter of Government policy - and has been for a number of years under successive Governments - to aim for what is called the SAFE 2 - Standard Authentication Framework Environment level 2 - standard of ID verification for public services. This can be done in one of two ways. Either every Department and agency which provides services to the public can go through the ID verification process to SAFE 2 standard, or one form of ID verified to that standard can be used across a number of services. The latter is far more convenient to the public as well as for the agencies concerned. It also will support the strengthening of the fixed penalty and enforcement system by implementing the SAFE 2 standard for identity authentication.

The process of issuing a PSC involves verification to SAFE 2 standard. The legislation allowing what are called 'specified bodies' to require production of a PSC as part of application processes has been in place since 2005.

Under the Government's eGovernment strategy, there is a target of March 2018 for the introduction of an online system of application for driving licences. At that point, people who have obtained a PSC and therefore have had their ID verified to SAFE 2 standard will be able to apply for driving licences online using their public service identity.

I am not clear what the Deputy has in mind in referring to using a driving licence as ID for a driving test. By definition someone doing a test does not have a driving licence. A person presenting themselves for a driving test must produce their learner permit. This will have been issued by the National Driver Licensing Service (NDLS), and contains a photograph taken at an NDLS centre. In the future, the basis of ID verification behind the learner permit will be at SAFE 2 standard.

Vehicle Registration

1573. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will expedite the return of a document to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37805/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's office in Shannon will contact the individual concerned and will arrange for the transfer of vehicle ownership document to be completed.

Road Improvement Schemes

1574. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 267 of 15 February 2017, when this grant will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37832/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The position remains as outlined in my previous reply to the Deputy as the Capital Plan Review has not been completed as yet.

Cycling Facilities Funding

1575. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will increase funding for the segregation of cycle lanes from motor vehicle traffic in view of the rise in cycling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37858/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Funding is allocated for cycling infrastructure and initiatives under a number of different programmes administered both directly by my Department and by the National Transport Authority.

Under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme, my Department provides funding to the NTA for the seven local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area for the implementation of sustainable transport measures, including cycling and walking infrastructure. €19m has been allocated to this programme in 2017. A portion of these funds will be used for the further development of the cycle network in the Greater Dublin Area, with a portion also directed towards the provision of cycle parking. A further €9.1m has been allocated in 2017 to the Regional Cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, for works to help improve mobility in those cities. In addition, approximately €9m will be spent by my Department on *Smarter Travel* initiatives.

Increasing the numbers of people cycling in Ireland is a priority for me since I recognise the contribution this can make in terms of tackling congestion. I am also keenly aware of the significant health benefits that are yielded when people adopt a more active lifestyle.

As part of the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, I am seeking to increase the level of funding available for the delivery of cycling infrastructure. The proposed BusConnects programme, once rolled out, will also provide a significant amount of segregated cycling infrastructure in the coming years.

Brexit Staff

1576. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official, the funding allocated to the Brexit unit, the cost to date and the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37999/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While all relevant areas of the Department are actively engaged in Brexit related work and consultations with stakeholders, overall responsibility for the preparation and coordination of the Department's response to Brexit has been assigned to the Head of Function of the Policy, Governance and EU Division.

Brexit issues relating to Tourism are managed by the Head of Function of the Tourism Marketing Policy and Impact Assessment Division. Both Heads of Functions are at Principal Officer level.

The additional cost to the Policy, Governance and EU Division arising from Brexit activities, outside of staff costs, was estimated to be €50,000 in 2017, of which some €10,000

has been incurred to date. The need for additional funding will be kept under ongoing review.

Brexit Staff

1577. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38015/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit has the potential to have serious adverse economic transport and tourism impacts and as a result has been identified as the main strategic risk facing the Department.

The Department in response has organised itself internally and while all relevant areas of the Department are actively engaged in Brexit-related work and consultation with stakeholders, overall responsibility for the preparation and coordination of its response to Brexit has been assigned to the Head of Function in the Policy, Governance and EU Division.

Brexit issues relating to Tourism are managed by the Head of Function of the Tourism Marketing Policy and Impact Assessment Division. Both Heads of Function are Principal Officers.

The support teams who deal with Brexit issues in addition to other duties are 3 staff in the Policy, Governance and EU Division and 3 staff on the tourism side.

The Management Board has, and will continue, to keep under review the Department's internal organisation and structures for Brexit to ensure that they remain robust in addressing the evolving Brexit situation.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

1578. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38031/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The construction of projects in the transport sector is the responsibility of a range of organisations including both non-commercial and commercial semi-state agencies. It is the responsibility of individual organisations (as sponsoring bodies) to operate within agreed budgets and to comply with this Department's Capital Appraisal Guidelines and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's (DPER) Public Spending Code. Procurement of projects must comply with DPER's procurement requirements and contracts must be in accordance with DPER's Public Works Contracts. Within this context it is the responsibility of Agencies to manage projects and ensure value for money including in relation to increases in anticipated costs over the life of projects. The Department does not separately monitor this aspect of agencies project management.

Tourism Industry

1579. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the recent figures published by the CSO showing a 9% drop in the

number of UK citizens visiting here; his plans to deal with the impact of Brexit and the fall in the value of sterling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38089/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Trips to Ireland for the first seven months of 2017 were up by 3.1% compared to the corresponding period in 2016. The data also indicates that the number of visits from Britain for the first seven months of 2017 was down by -6.2% compared to the same period in 2016.

Since the UK voted to leave the EU, my department has been fully engaged in evaluating the ensuing risks for tourism and, together with the tourism agencies, working to address those risks. The department's analysis of the situation was greatly assisted by the All-Island sectorial meeting I hosted with the industry in January which examined the impact of Brexit on the tourism and hospitality sector. From a departmental perspective, we will continue our work across Government to ensure that our concerns are high on the agenda. For tourism, the priorities include maintaining a liberalised aviation regime, preserving the common travel area, avoiding a hard border and retaining British-Irish visa agreements for third countries.

The tourism agencies are engaged in the operational aspects of preparing for Brexit and the impact of the fall in the value of sterling. I have referred the Deputy's question to both tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland for further details of the initiatives underway. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Network Expansion

1580. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the DART expansion programme and the electrification of the Sligo line from Connolly to Maynooth together with removal of level crossings and re-signalling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38090/17]

1583. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding his Department's work with Iarnród Éireann regarding the electrification of the Maynooth line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38094/17]

1602. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress on securing funding under the mid-term capital review for the electrification of the Maynooth and Kildare rail lines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38509/17]

1612. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the comments attributed to the CEO of Irish Rail regarding pressure in capacity on the Maynooth line that the most sensible rail investment to prioritise is the upgrading of this route to DART standard; his views on whether this would benefit the commuter population using the line and pave the way for building more affordable housing easily accessible to Dublin city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38628/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1580, 1583, 1602 and 1612 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority's 'Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035' proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme involving electrification of the Northern line as far as Drogheda, the Kildare Line to Hazelhatch, the Sligo line to Maynooth in the west and to the M3 Parkway and construction of the DART underground tunnel.

The Government decided in September 2015 that the original proposal for the tunnel should be redesigned and work is underway on that at present. Due to constraints on funding, not all of the elements of the DART Expansion Programme can be progressed during the lifetime of the current Capital Plan. Funding has been allocated for the extension of the DART to Balbriggan and for work on the redesign of the tunnel.

As I have previously informed the Deputy, I have sought additional funding for public transport in the context of the ongoing mid-term review of the Capital Plan. This includes increased funding to accelerate implementation of the DART Expansion Programme.

Rail Network

1581. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the actions his Department has taken in respect of the report published by Iarnród Éireann regarding the company's funding shortfall and ability to invest and maintain its existing infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38092/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The taxpayer makes a significant and recurring contribution each year to Iarnród Éireann. This contribution takes the form of both current, PSO funding and also capital funding under the IMMAC (infrastructure management multi-annual contract) and through the National Transport Authority. Last year this funding totalled almost €300m and increased funding will be provided to the Company again this year.

In August 2015 my Department published the *Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport* (SFILT) which outlined the funding pressures across both our rail and road networks and made a number of recommendations in respect of key priorities and principles for future investment.

In relation to rail, the SFILT recommended the development of a new rail policy and last year the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann published the *Rail Review Report 2016* on which the NTA held a public consultation. Over 300 submissions were received by the NTA and the authority is preparing a report of those submissions.

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

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

Public Transport Initiatives

1582. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding his Department's work with local authorities and transport providers on the

bus rapid transport scheme in the Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38093/17]

1613. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the NTA plans to create new bus connections between the new Luas terminus in Broombridge and the surrounding communities in Navan Road, Ashtown, Cabra and Finglas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38629/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1582 and 1613 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) launched the BusConnects initiative in May which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The proposed measures includes the development of a network of 'next generation' bus corridors, three bus rapid transit routes, and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations. As I have previously informed the Deputy, I have sought additional funding for public transport investment in the ongoing mid-term review of the Capital Plan to support this initiative.

Given the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for a more detailed reply in relation to the bus network redesign process. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Question No. 1583 answered with Question No. 1580.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

1584. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the applications received for the current round of sports capital grants; when he expects a decision to be made regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38109/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): A list of all applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme is available on the Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-applications-received>.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in the coming weeks.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

1585. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications his Department has received from Cork city and county under the sports capital grant, by application and the amounts sought for each application, including those made by local authorities. [38132/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all applications submitted under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme, including the details sought by the Deputy have been published on the Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-applications-received>.

Sports Capital Programme Applications Data

1586. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications his Department has received from Cork City Council and Cork County Council under the sports capital grant, by application and the amounts sought for each application. [38133/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): A list of all applications received under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme, including the information sought by the Deputy, is available on the Department's website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-applications-received>.

Public Services Card

1587. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plan to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38154/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): It is envisioned that the future Driver & Vehicle Online portals including new Online Change of Vehicle Ownership services will use the MyGovID functionality for authenticating users who access the online systems in line with government policy but these have not been fully defined or scoped so there is no definite decision or timescales in relation to implementation.

As for agencies under the remit of my Department, this is a matter for the agencies themselves. I have forwarded your question them for direct response to you. If you do not receive a reply within 10 working days please don't hesitate to contact my private office.

Legislative Programme

1588. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress he has made with the Minister for Justice and Equality, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Garda Commissioner and the chairman of the Revenue Commissioners in establishing a multi-agency approach in order to ascertain if there are additional legislative or other solutions which can assist in dealing with the use of scrambler and quad bikes more comprehensively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38174/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am not aware of a multi-agency approach to tackle the use of scrambler and quad bikes. However, I must point out that there is already comprehensive legislation in place governing the use of scrambler bikes, quad bikes and similar small vehicles in a public place, with enforcement being entirely a matter for an Garda Síochána. The use of such vehicles in other areas, such as parks and on private land, is beyond the remit of my Department.

However, it should be noted that an Garda Síochána does not have any legislative power to deal with scrambler bikes being driven on private land. Local authorities have the power to introduce by-laws to prohibit the use of vehicles in areas under their control, eg parks. The Minister for Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs has similar powers to control off-road vehicles in certain areas, eg the unauthorised use of off-road vehicles is prohibited in certain national parks.

Swimming Pool Programme

1589. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Lucan swimming pool project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38181/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In January of 2016, my Department contacted local authorities and sought expressions of interest in a limited round of swimming pool allocations under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP). There were three expressions of interest received for new pools, two of which were valid and both in Dublin. Having assessed existing commitments and the funding available, it was decided to include the proposal from South Dublin County Council (SDCC) for a new swimming pool in Lucan in the LASPP.

My Department wrote to SDCC in April 2016 advising the Council to undertake the Preliminary Report stage (which includes the Feasibility Study, Appointment of Consultants for Preliminary Proposals and Design Brief). Documentation in this regard was received from SDCC in July 2016. Following examination by my Department's technical advisor and my officials, SDCC was given approval in October 2016 to appoint the recommended design team and proceed to the design brief. In April of this year, the detailed drawings were received by my Department and referred to my Department's technical advisor for consideration. Following clarification of some technical queries, my Department issued approval to the technical design element of the Preliminary Report on the 5th July. This approval allows the Council to have the detailed contract documents prepared and therefore has allowed SDCC to proceed to the Part 8 planning process. My Department is continuing to liaise with SDCC in relation to some other outstanding documentation.

Garda Strength

1590. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 399 of 12 July 2017, the progress which has been made to date to increase the Garda traffic corps by 10% during 2017 as set out by An Garda Síochána as a priority in the Garda policing plan 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38182/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I set out my understanding of the broad position regarding the planned increase in enforcement by An Garda Síochána in 2017 in my answer to Question No. 399. In 2017 I have increased the frequency of meetings of the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety, which includes senior representatives of An Garda Síochána, and I have been assured at the most recent meeting of that Committee in July that An Garda Síochána is using every available resource, in close co-operation with the Road Safety Authority, to reduce the number of fatal and serious injuries on our roads. As of last Friday (8 September 2017) the number of fatalities on our roads was down by 24 on the same period last year and this I believe is a tribute to the work of the entire spectrum of road safety stakeholders, including my own Department, the Road Safety Authority and An Garda Síochána.

However, the Deputy will appreciate that the issues raised by him as regards specific enforcement levels by An Garda Síochána including the exact current levels of the Garda Traffic Corps and the detailed implementation of Garda policing plans for 2017 are matters which fall within the area of responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality, and the Deputy may wish to raise the matter directly with my colleague accordingly.

Public Transport

1591. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the enhanced services to be provided by the new bus operator in Dublin (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38193/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

Departmental Bodies Data

1592. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the chairperson and board positions for each body and organisation under his remit that remain to be filled; the length of time that each vacancy has existed; when he expects to fill each vacant position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38194/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information requested by the Deputy is available on my Department's website at the following link: State Boards.

Motor Insurance

1593. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made regarding the establishment of a motor insurance database; when this database will be fully functioning and operational; the agency or Department which will have responsibility for its operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38198/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) will have ownership of the motor insurance database and will have responsibility for its operation.

The motor insurance database referred to is known as the Motor Third Party Liability (MTPL) insurance database. The project is to be completed in stages and Phase 1 relating to privately owned motor vehicles is currently under way. Phase 1 will provide insured and uninsured vehicle lists to An Garda Síochána based on vehicle licence plate number and insurer name. This will include providing a list of uninsured vehicles that can be loaded into the An Garda Síochána Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system. This phase has commenced initial testing with An Garda Síochána. I hope that this will assist An Garda Síochána to tackle the level of uninsured driving and so will help to reduce the cost of uninsured driving on the premiums of ordinary motorists.

Phase 2 includes the capturing of driver licence numbers and has an expected date for its completion of Quarter 3 2020, with at that stage a target of 100% of driver licence numbers to be made available for the MTPL database for privately owned motor vehicles, which makes up in the region of 92% of insured vehicles. This Phase will provide a more complete picture of insurance status, for example, not just on whether insurance is in place on the vehicle but also regarding who is insured to drive the vehicle.

While I would like to see the said timelines improved upon I acknowledge the commitment

of the insurance industry to deliver the MTPL insurance database project as soon as possible. In tandem with the efforts of the insurance industry, my Department will do everything possible to support the efforts of the insurance industry including as necessary through road traffic legislative measures to support the efforts of the industry in developing the database.

Tourism Industry

1594. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the specific actions being taken to arrest the continuing decline in UK visitor numbers here in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38217/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the boards and management of the tourism agencies. Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

National Transport Authority

1595. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which NTA plans to overhaul services in large provincial centres will affect bus services in County Louth. [38256/17]

1596. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the NTA has met with Louth County Council to consult with it in advance of plans to overhaul services in large provincial centres. [38257/17]

1597. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the NTA plans to seek funding from local authorities such as Louth County Council as part of its development plans to overhaul services in large provincial centres. [38258/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1595 to 1597, inclusive, together.

The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

Departmental Bodies Data

1598. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the annual percentage of non-commercial State sponsored bodies staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38368/17]

1599. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38391/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 1598 and 1599 together.

The information requested by the Deputy pertaining to my Department is outlined in the following table:

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (as at end August)
% Women	50.4%	49.0%	47.1%	47.4%	48.4%	49.0%	49.7%	47.9%

The position regarding the non-Commercial State Sponsored bodies under the remit of this Department is a matter for their direct response. I have asked the Bodies to provide the Deputy with the information requested. If you do not receive a reply from the Bodies within ten working days, please advise my private office.

Regional Airports

1600. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the allocation for upgrade or maintenance for each regional airport over each of the past ten years. [38494/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's funding of regional airports is under the Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019. This Programme provides for Exchequer support towards safety and security related projects and activities at the four regional airports in Donegal, Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK), Kerry and Waterford under four separate Schemes:

- Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) Grant Scheme;
- Operational Expenditure (OPEX) Grant Scheme;
- Public Policy Remit* Capital Expenditure (PPR-C) Grant Scheme; and
- Public Policy Remit* Operational Expenditure (PPR-O) Grant Scheme.

*Public Policy Remit (PPR) Schemes, introduced in 2015, cover projects and operations at airports which are generally obligatory under national or international aviation requirements and which involve costs for the airports that generate no economic return (e.g. ATC, fire services, security services, etc.).

Details of Exchequer support to the four regional airports under the above Schemes in the period 2006 - 2016 are set out in the following tables:

CAPEX (Capital Grants)	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Donegal	€231,290	€0	€431,759	€339,474	€0	€2,111,313
Galway	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€222,944
Kerry	€181,440	€0	€133,156	€740,958	€1,633,946	€399,348
Knock	€1,201,045	€0	€1,925,413	€2,013,023	€699,007	€233,282
Sligo	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€237,531
Waterford	€0	€43,839	€533,210	€361,686	€1,333,830	€795,582
Derry	€0	€0	€0	€0	€345,590	€751,322
Total	€1,613,775	€43,839	€3,023,538	€3,455,141	€4,012,373	€4,751,322

table cont.

CAPEX (Capital Grants)	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Donegal	€353,500	€33,536	€992,610	€299,524	€49,490
Galway	€90,000	€453,624	€1,049,692	€673,892	€0
Kerry	€0	€45,000	€334,393	€189,074	€98,107
Knock	€823,344	€3,874,018	€4,626,956	€699,465	€529,365
Sligo	€0	€84,989	€112,580	€303,911	€124,000
Waterford	€23,381	€223,606	€1,907,729	€1,174,487	€0
Derry	€133,698	€2,507,008	€5,059,011	€0	€0
Total	€1,423,923	€7,221,781	€14,082,971	€3,340,353	€800,962

OPEX (Operational Expenditure Support)	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
Donegal	€0	€0	€0	€0	€111,417	€42,630
Galway	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€2,309,191
Kerry	€0	€0	€507,224	€436,918	€550,000	€950,000
Knock	€0	€0	€548,600	€654,576	€589,644	€431,907
Sligo	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€386,535
Waterford	€594,493	€756,825	€1,038,784	€1,121,399	€1,232,964	€1,272,071
Total	€594,493	€756,825	€2,094,608	€2,212,893	€2,484,025	€5,392,334

table cont.

OPEX (Operational Expenditure Support)	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Donegal	€277,692	€131,000	€0	€44,000	€64,600
Galway	€1,799,339	€962,000	€1,200,000	€859,000	€677,848
Kerry	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Knock	€760,948	€445,000	€0	€0	€0
Sligo	€394,839	€313,000	€0	€9,000	€231,200
Waterford	€1,584,458	€1,494,000	€1,540,000	€1,352,000	€687,685
Total	€4,817,276	€3,345,000	€2,740,000	€2,264,000	€1,661,333

PPR-Capital (2015 - 2019)	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Donegal	€220,022	€398,995	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Kerry	€129,262	€402,783	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Knock (IWAK)	€764,609	€564,622	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Waterford	€18,381	€732,286	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Total	€1,132,274	€2,098,686	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0

PPR-Operational (2015 - 2019)	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Donegal	€356,597	€226,059	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Kerry	€626,855	€311,260	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Knock (IWAK)	€967,765	€598,349	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0

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Waterford	€425,722	€382,205	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0
Total	€2,376,939	€1,517,873	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0	€0

Bus Services

1601. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of tenders received by the National Transport Authority in relation to the operation of a public bus service on route 139, Naas to Blanchardstown, by the closing date of 30 August 2017; when the assessment of the tenders will be completed and the contract awarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38507/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

Question No. 1602 answered with Question No. 1580.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland

1603. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will instruct the TII to engage with a person (details supplied) regarding a case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38519/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Driver Test Data

1604. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driving test examiners who have been appointed in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38521/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Driver Test Data

1605. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driving test examiners who are employed. [38522/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Driver Test Data

1606. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of driving text examiners his Department plans to employ in the next year. [38523/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Regional Road Network

1607. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his Department's contribution to non-national road schemes in Dublin South-West; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38585/17]

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

Arising from the arrangements in place in relation to Local Property Tax receipts the four Dublin Councils became self-funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015. Provision was made in the Capital Plan for the upgrade of roads in the vicinity of Grange Castle Business Park and the Department is providing grant assistance for that strategic scheme at present.

Details of the regional and local road grant payments to local authorities and allocations for 2017 are outlined in the regional and local road grant payment and allocation booklets which are available in the Dáil Library.

Sports Capital Programme Data

1608. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the sports capital funding to organisations (details supplied) and other sports by project, in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017; the largest allocation given; the number of projects; the amount per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38587/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all allocations and payments made under the sports capital programme are available on the Department's website: <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>. Payments information for 2017 will be published in early 2018.

Sports Capital Programme Data

1609. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the sports capital funding by county in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38588/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Details of all allocations and payments made under the sports capital programme are available on the Department's website at: <http://www.dttas.ie/sport/english/sports-capital-programme>.

Transport Infrastructure Provision

1610. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for projects within the South Dublin County Council administrative area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38589/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the administration of the *Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme*. This rolling programme of measures facilitates investment in various QBCs, cycling/walking, safety and traffic management projects throughout the seven local authority areas in the Greater Dublin Area, including South Dublin County Council.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for the STMG Programme, I have referred your question to the Authority for a more detailed reply in relation to sustainable transport projects in South Dublin. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

In relation to regional and local roads in the South Dublin area, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on regional and local roads are funded from the relevant local authorities' own resources supplemented by State grants, where applicable. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

Arising from the arrangements in place in relation to Local Property Tax receipts the four Dublin Councils became self-funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015. Provision was made in the Capital Plan for the upgrade of roads in the vicinity of Grange Castle Business Park and the Department is providing grant assistance for that strategic scheme at present.

Furthermore, the 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on the 24th February and a number of applications have been received from within the South Dublin County Council administrative area. All of the applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. Given the record number of applications and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process. I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in the coming month.

Appointments to State Boards

1611. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will fill the vacancies on the boards of Irish Rail, Bus Éireann, the National Transport Authority, the Road Safety Authority and Fáilte Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38611/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Appointments to State Boards under the aegis of my Department are made in line with both the Government Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards and my Departments Principles and Procedures for State Board Appointments both of which are available to view on my Departments website through the following link: <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/state-board-membership-and-approved-fees>. Information regarding current board membership can also be found on the Department's website through this link.

In relation to CIÉ, Irish Rail and the National Transport Authority, the filling of existing Chair level vacancies is being arranged in line with the Guidelines and Principles and Procedures above.

In relation to the current Chair vacancy at Bus Éireann and impending Chair vacancy at Bus Átha Cliath, those vacancies have been considered in line with the Guidelines and Principles and Procedures and those processes will be finalised very shortly with announcements to follow.

In relation to the Road Safety Authority and Fáilte Ireland my Department are again working in line with the Guidelines and Principles and Procedures to finalise campaigns to fill these vacancies.

As Minister I do not necessarily have to fill all of the vacancies on each Board and I am currently considering the size of boards under my remit and the need or otherwise to fill each vacancy. In my view some of the Boards are unnecessarily large for the size of the State Body in question and it is something that I am reviewing within the flexibility of the underlying statutory provisions.

Question No. 1612 answered with Question No. 1580.

Question No. 1613 answered with Question No. 1582.

Tourism Funding

1614. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated amount it would cost in 2018 to increase the tourism marketing fund by 10% for each Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38648/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Tourism Ireland share of the Tourism Marketing Fund for 2017 was €26,706,000. A 10% increase would cost €2,670,600. The Fáilte Ireland share of the Tourism Marketing Fund for 2017 was €9,147,000. A 10% increase would cost €914,700.

Ministerial Meetings

1615. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has formally met with the CEOs of all of the regional airports to discuss the impact of Brexit on tourism and the aviation industry here; if so, the dates of these meetings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38660/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I met with representatives of Waterford and Farranfore Airports while visiting the regions on 13 February 2017 and

19 April 2017 respectively, during which a range of issues were discussed. I did not specifically meet with those airports to discuss Brexit matters.

Issues arising as a result of the UK's plans to leave the EU are being managed on a whole-of-government basis, with overall responsibility resting with the Department of An Taoiseach. My Department is represented on the Economy and Trade Group and also on the Aviation and Tourism sub-groups under these structures. Officials of my Department are in close liaison with the aviation sector, including airlines and airports, to assess the implications of Brexit on that sector.

Airlines and airports, including representatives of the regional airports, among other aviation stakeholders, as well as my Department are represented on the National Civil Aviation Development Forum Working Group on Regulatory Affairs. This Group has extensively considered the aviation implications of Brexit and has met with the Department's representative on the Interdepartmental Group of Senior Officials to discuss the concerns of the aviation industry. Representatives of the Group have also met with senior officials in the Department of the Taoiseach in relation to those concerns. The outcome of these consultations informs the analyses of the Department and feeds into the overall analyses of Government.

Road Safety

1616. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the regulations in place with regards to frontal protection systems commonly known as bull bars; and the person or body that is in charge of enforcing these regulations. [38672/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Frontal protection systems, either fitted by a vehicle manufacturer or supplied as a separate technical unit and intended for fitting to new passenger cars and light goods vehicles, must meet the requirements of EC Regulation 78/2009, which was transposed into Irish law in the Road Vehicles Entry into Service Regulations (S.I. No. 157 of 2009) and the Mechanically Propelled Vehicle Entry into Service (S.I. No. 448 of 2007).

Systems for fitment to these vehicles must satisfy a number of tests before they can be type-approved for use on new vehicles. Also, type-approved frontal protection systems can only be distributed, offered for sale or sold when accompanied by a list of vehicle types for which the frontal protection system is type approved, as well as clear assembly instructions. The proof that it meets with the requirements is the presence of an e-mark. All systems fitted or made available for fitting to new vehicles at registration or before entry in to service since 21 May 2007 must bear an e-mark. If it does not, then the vehicle should not be registered or allowed entry into service.

Once vehicles are in service they must adhere to the requirements set out in the Road Traffic (Construction, Equipment & Use of Vehicles) Regulations (S.I. No. 190 of 1963). Regulation 32 states that vehicles "shall not have any inessential object in a position where it is likely to strike any person involved in a collision with the vehicle, unless injury is not likely to be caused by reason of the projection of the object". Furthermore Regulation 96 states that "every vehicle while used in a public place shall be such, and so maintained and used, that no danger is likely to be caused to any person". Owners or drivers of vehicles breaching these regulations may be found guilty of an offence under Section 11 of the Road Traffic Act 1961.

Enforcement of the Road Traffic Regulations is a matter for An Garda Síochána.

Brexit Issues

1617. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38701/17]

1618. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38717/17]

1619. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38733/17]

1620. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38749/17]

1621. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38765/17]

1622. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38781/17]

1623. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38813/17]

1625. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38845/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1617 to 1623, inclusive, and 1625 together.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach" published on 2 May 2017 outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in the comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;

- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;

- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;

- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;

- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectorial policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

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Brexit has been identified as the major strategic risk facing my Department, and I and my officials are continuing to prioritise work on identifying and planning measures to mitigate these risks.

Any physical or regulatory barriers to the ease of the existing access links within the Island of Ireland, and between Ireland and our international markets could hinder the current arrangements for aviation, maritime and international road transport services. The weakness of sterling is also, and will continue to, impact on business, international transport and travel and on the competitiveness of Ireland's tourist offering.

Based on our engagements with stakeholders and on our internal and cross-governmental analyses, my Department has identified and the priority potential threats and risks facing the transport and tourism sectors. These include:

- minimising the impact of Brexit on the tourism industry by preserving the Common Travel Area, avoiding a hard border on the Island of Ireland, and maintaining a liberalised aviation regime to protect and promote access.
- maintaining in so far as possible the existing common standards and regulatory regimes (e.g. international haulage, maritime).
- the avoidance of a hard border between North and South,
- the protection of the fully liberalised and deregulated aviation market and current aviation traffic rights with respect to the various air transport markets.
- the treatment of EU and UK airlines as well as EU and UK nationals in terms of ownership and control rules.

In response to these analyses, my Department is undertaking contingency planning by examining a number of scenarios, including a no-deal scenario, and this work will evolve in line with the negotiations. The sectorial response plans that will emerge from this will identify actions and funding that may be required in response to threats from Brexit. The tourism sector has already identified additional funding requirements in particular for tourism marketing and these will be considered by Government in the context of the forthcoming budget.

The analyses to date suggests that the opportunities arising from Brexit in the transport and tourism sectors will be limited. We have seen some interest in a number of transport related activities establishing in Ireland from the UK, but these have been relatively limited to date. The Department will continue to actively monitor for further opportunities that may arise.

The matter and timing of publication of the sectorial response plans will be considered when the Department's contingency planning is complete.

Brexit Staff

1624. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit-related roles; the expected date for these roles to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38829/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): All relevant areas of the Department are actively engaged in Brexit related work and consultations with stakeholders. Overall responsibility for the preparation and coordination of the Department's response to Brexit has been assigned to the Head of Function of the Policy, Governance and EU Division. Brexit issues relating to Tourism are managed by the Head of Function of the Tourism Marketing Policy and Impact Assessment Division. Both Heads of Functions are at Principal Officer level.

The Minister and Management Board members are actively involved in reviewing the implications and response to Brexit. The Management Board keeps under review the Department's internal organisation and structures for Brexit to ensure that they remain robust in addressing the evolving Brexit situation. As part of the Department's Workforce planning, one further position at Executive Officer level has been identified within Policy, Governance and EU Division, part of which is related to Brexit duties. The filling of this position is subject to overall decisions on the Workforce plan.

Question No. 1625 answered with Question No. 1617.

Brexit Issues

1626. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38861/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit is a key strategic risk for my Department and there are ongoing consultations and meetings between my officials, other Government Departments and agencies, and other public and private key stakeholders in order to plan for and mitigate the risks associated with Brexit and to identify opportunities arising.

My Department engages with a range of stakeholders across the various sectorial areas on an ongoing basis. In addition, an internal Departmental Committee on Brexit meets on a monthly basis to oversee the Department's analyses and implications as the negotiations progress.

As part of my Department's preparations for Brexit, there has been wide engagement with sectorial stakeholders. I hosted an All-Island Transport and Logistics Sectorial Dialogue in Dundalk on 23 January 2017 as well as an All-Island Dialogue on tourism the same day. The

Dialogues were attended in total by over 200 transport and civic representatives from North and South. My Department also held a stakeholder workshop in April on the possible impacts of Brexit on maritime transport regulation and on the sectors on which this impacts, including merchant shipping, national shipping, fishing vessels, recreational craft, ports, equipment suppliers, service providers and training providers.

The Department is represented at meetings of a sub-group of the National Civil Aviation Development Forum, at which Brexit is a standing agenda item. The sub-group includes representatives from the airlines, airports, regulators and my Department and meets approximately every two months. My Department also chairs a Tourism Brexit Working Group which includes representatives of the main tourism agencies. It has met three times and last met on 18 May 2017.

Ministerial Meetings

1627. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the planned meetings with his European colleagues and officials to address Brexit-related issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38877/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I will meet the European Commissioner for Transport, Ms Violeta Bulc, during her planned visit Ireland this October at which I will again raise with her Ireland's concerns on the implications of Brexit. I previously met Commissioner Bulc in June of this year at the Transport Council in Luxembourg.

Since May of this year, I have also met with my UK, Swedish and Austrian counterparts with whom I discussed Brexit issues. I also met with members of the External Affairs Committee of the Welsh Assembly during their recent visit to Dublin.

I will be speaking to Mr Ken Skates AM, the Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, by phone later this week with a view to also meeting him at a later stage. I plan to meet as many other EU Ministers as is feasible over the coming months as the Brexit negotiations progress.

My officials met members of the Barnier Team in June of this year and have also met with officials of the European Commission. They will continue ongoing contact with their European, UK and Northern Ireland counterparts as the negotiations progress.

Brexit Issues

1628. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38893/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit is a key priority for my Department and a number of Brexit-related research studies have been carried out on behalf of transport and tourism agencies and organisations in relation to Brexit.

My Department, in conjunction with the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), is commencing a study into the use of the UK Landbridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of this research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK Landbridge at present, the likely consequences that Brexit will have on Landbridge usage and the various options that

may be viable. I expect this piece of research to be completed in Q1 of 2018.

My Department, in monitoring the sectorial areas and the potential impacts of Brexit, will consider whether any further specific research is required to be carried out over the coming months.

Departmental Expenditure

1629. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38909/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This Department has a Capital Budget which is committed to number of programmes and projects including in the areas of Public Transport, Roads and Sports Capital Programmes. The majority of the projects are on target with some ahead, for example quicker than anticipated completion of the Luas Cross City Project.

We expect all programmes to come in on profile for 2017 by year end and do not envisage any available funding for return to the central exchequer.

The multi-annual nature of the Capital Projects Programmes, for example Sports Capital, allow for any savings achieved to be reallocated within the programme, on approved projects awaiting funding.

The Mid-Year Expenditure Report sets out the pre-Budget expenditure ceiling for my Ministerial Vote Group of €680 million for current expenditure and €1281 million for capital expenditure. This represents the spending baseline for examination of my Department's budgetary priorities for 2018.

As outlined in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, the increases planned in expenditure for the delivery of public services are set at sustainable levels in order to ensure that the resources allocated are affordable both now and in the future. Consequently, it is important that there is an ongoing focus on the totality of Departmental spending and not just the incremental increase each year.

Earlier in 2017 we have conducted a Spending Review which will support the consideration of existing expenditure alongside budgetary proposals. If any savings are identified during the Estimates process they can be used to meet any emerging expenditure pressures without impacting on the available fiscal space. Work is ongoing in this regard.

In this overall context, there are no such savings earmarked or included in calculations for 2018 for this Department.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

1630. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reach agreement with the USA to include it on the recognised countries list for the purposes of driver licence exchange; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38959/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue of whether driving licence exchange with the USA would be possible has been examined and is, regrettably, not being pursued at this time given the complexities involved.

Driver licensing law is grounded on the principle that people must meet certain defined standards. Irish driver licensing law operates within a framework of EU law, which sets common standards for driver testing across all Member States. On this basis, all EU licences are mutually exchangeable.

In the case of licences issued by non-EU states, we may reach bilateral agreements on exchange. This is not a straightforward matter. The relevant authorities must first compare to two licensing regimes in detail so that each side may be satisfied that they are compatible. On the Irish side, this task is undertaken by the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

The RSA has previously examined the possibility of reaching exchange agreements with the USA. However, US driver licensing operates at state rather than federal level. This means that there are 50 different systems, sometimes with greatly varying standards. Reaching agreement would mean reaching 50 agreements, each of which would have to take account of the arrangements which exist between that state and the other 49. This would not be feasible.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

1631. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal can expect to receive a date for a driving test; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38960/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Data Protection

1632. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the terms of access, the precautions in place and the personal public service data that can be accessed by a company (details supplied); the sanctions in place for breach or misuse of this data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39007/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

School Completion Programme

1633. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the most recent figure for the full-year funding allocated to the school completion programme for DEIS schools. [37694/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been advised by Tusla that the full year funding allocated in the current year (2017) to the School Completion Programme is €24.7 million.

Departmental Funding

1634. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding allocated to an organisation (details supplied) in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38586/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2017, funding of €57.4 million has been provided to my Department for various youth schemes, an increase of €5.5 million over 2016. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme, amounting to €10.65 million in 2017, under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. This funding is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people.

Scouting Ireland receives grant aid on an annual basis under the Youth Service Grant Scheme. Details of the funding allocated to Scouting Ireland for the years 2011 to 2017 are outlined hereunder.

Youth Service Grant Scheme	Year	Grant - €
	2017	876,337
	2016	834,607
	2015	814,250
	2014	814,250
	2013	845,974
	2012	939,971
	2011	1,005,317

In addition to the above, Scouting Ireland was allocated €150,000 in current funding in 2015 and a further €200,000 in Dormant Accounts funding in 2016 to support the Operation Lelievlet youth employment initiative.

Scouting Ireland also received €49,630 under the capital funding scheme for youth projects and services in 2016 to fund the improvement of disability access and security at Scouting Ireland.

In 2015 €30,000 was also allocated to Scouting Ireland to assist it with its budget sustainability to the year end.

Departmental Staff Data

1635. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of political staff employed in her Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within her Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36948/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I take the part

of the Deputy's question on seconded staff to refer to seconded staff specifically working in the Minister's office or constituency office.

There were no civil or public service staff seconded by my Department to work in the Minister's office or constituency office in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

In respect of political staff employed in this Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisors, drivers and other relevant positions, the details are set out as follows in respect of the numbers, salary scales, and job titles/roles for each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017.

2015 (31st Dáil) - Minister Reilly	
Position Held	Salary
Special Adviser	€87,258
Special Adviser	€82,587
Personal Assistant	€47,304
Personal Secretary	€29,342
Civilian Driver	€32,965
Civilian Driver	€32,965
2016 (32nd Dáil) - Minister Reilly	
Position Held	Salary
Special Adviser	€85,750
Special Adviser	€85,750
Personal Assistant	See note
Civilian Driver	€32,965
Civilian Driver	€32,965
2017 (32nd Dáil) - Minister Zappone	
Position Held	Salary
Special Adviser	€88,936
Special Adviser	€88,936
Personal Assistant	See note
Civilian Driver	€32,965
Civilian Driver	€32,965

All my Ministerial staff appointments have been made in accordance with Instructions for Ministerial Appointments as published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in June 2016.

Note: In accordance with revised arrangements put in place for the 32nd Dáil, my Personal Assistant is paid under the Scheme for Secretarial Assistance by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Family Resource Centres

1636. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla plans to engage with a union (details supplied) regarding its representation of family resource centres to the WRC on the issue of better pay and conditions. [36966/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides funding to support the work of a large number of Family Resource

Centres throughout the country. This funding is provided under an annual Service Level Agreement, and is by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres.

Family Resource Centres are independent companies limited by guarantee and are managed by a Voluntary Board of Management which is representative of the local community. They operate independently of Tusla. Each individual Family Resource Centre is responsible for the recruitment of employees and the terms and conditions under which they are employed.

Tusla very much values the work of Family Resource Centres and recognises the positive impact of their work in supporting families and local communities around the country. Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to children and families in their communities.

Family Resource Centres

1637. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her Department's approach and plans to ensure the future sustainability of family resource centres. [36967/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are over 100 Family Resource Centres currently in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provides funding to the centres under an annual Service Level Agreement. This funding is provided by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres. The 2017 Tusla allocation to Family Resource Centres is €13.512 million.

Family Resource Centres are front-line services rooted in the communities they serve. Acting as a focal point within their communities, Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their communities. While Family Resource Centres operate an open-door policy and provide many services and development opportunities at a universal level, they also proactively target specific cohorts within their communities.

Tusla fully appreciates the role that Family Resource Centres play in offering early intervention support to families in difficulty.

It is not possible at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be made available by Tusla to Family Resource Centres in 2018. This issue will be clarified in the context of the annual Estimates process and having regard to the overall level of funding available to Tusla in 2018.

Youth Services Funding

1638. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will reconsider the application for funding by an organisation (details supplied). [36974/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 million has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of

youth services, an increase of €5.5 million on 2016. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

Earlier this year, I was please to approve funding of €800,000 for the establishment of new youth projects and for the augmentation of a small number of existing youth services to meet new challenges arising from population increases. This additional investment is being provided in regions of the country where there is a pressing need for services to meet the needs of young people.

Each of the sixteen Education and Training Boards, including Laois and Offaly ETB, was invited to nominate locations within their catchment areas for the establishment of new services and to nominate a project or service to be considered for augmentation. In total twenty-eight applications for new services were received, including an application for a new service which would be partly based in Mountmellick.

Based on the recommendations of a specially convened appraisal committee, and given the very limited resources available for the scheme, I approved the establishment of nine new targeted youth services across the country.

The application in respect of Laois was, unfortunately, not successful on this occasion. Should further moneys be made available to my Department in the coming years, it is my intention to invite Education and Training Boards to nominate locations for the establishment of new services.

Family Resource Centres

1639. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if Tusla will attend the Workplace Relations Commission talks with an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37000/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides funding to support the work of a large number of Family Resource Centres throughout the country. This funding is provided under an annual Service Level Agreement, and is by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres.

Family Resource Centres are independent companies limited by guarantee and are managed by a Voluntary Board of Management which is representative of the local community. They operate independently of Tusla. Each individual Family Resource Centre is responsible for the recruitment of employees and the terms and conditions under which they are employed.

Tusla very much values the work of Family Resource Centres and recognises the positive impact of their work in supporting families and local communities around the country. Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to children and families in their communities.

Departmental Staff Data

1640. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of women and men, respectively, employed in her Department in tabular form. [37067/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): At 31 August 2017, the following staff numbers (headcount) by gender in my Department were as set out in the following table:

Women	Men
142	85

Departmental Staff Data

1641. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of men and women, respectively, in her Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37078/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information sought by the Deputy is set out as follows, correct as of 31 August 2017. In the interest of clarity, the post of Director has been included.

Grade	Men	Women
Secretary General	1	0
Second Secretary	0	0
Deputy Secretary	0	0
Assistant Secretary	1	2
Director	0	1
Principal Officer	7	13
Assistant Principal	21	24

Family Resource Centres

1642. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a workplace dispute; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37091/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides funding to support the work of a large number of Family Resource Centres throughout the country. This funding is provided under an annual Service Level Agreement, and is by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres.

Family Resource Centres are independent companies limited by guarantee and are managed by a Voluntary Board of Management which is representative of the local community. They operate independently of Tusla. Each individual Family Resource Centre is responsible for the recruitment of employees and the terms and conditions under which they are employed.

Tusla very much values the work of Family Resource Centres and recognises the positive impact of their work in supporting families and local communities around the country. Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to children and families in their communities.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

1643. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to

introduce a cap on crèche fees further to reports that crèches around the country are raising their fees as a consequence of the introduction of subsidies for child care costs, effectively utilising the extra funding made available to parents. [37178/17]

1644. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many crèches are increasing their fees on foot of the introduction of subsidies for child care costs, effectively utilising the extra funding made available to parents; and her views on the perceived major design flaw of the scheme. [37179/17]

1650. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some child care providers have increased costs proportionate to the amount provided in the affordable childcare scheme which neutralises the benefit for families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37559/17]

1651. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that families are struggling to meet the new charges imposed by some child care providers following the introduction of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37560/17]

1656. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to child care fees rising in line with the new affordable childcare scheme making the subsidy ineffective for parents; the measures she will take to prevent this practice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37681/17]

1664. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the widespread practice by crèches to increase their fees in line with the newly introduced affordable childcare payment; the measures she is taking to address this problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37895/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1643, 1644, 1650, 1651, 1656 and 1664 together.

As the Deputies will be aware, the factors impacting on the costs across delivery of services in any sector are complex and multifaceted. The cost to childcare providers is affected by many factors such as rates, rent, labour costs, and insurance amongst other things.

The cost to parents to access that childcare is decided by childcare providers taking account of these overheads.

Notwithstanding this, I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality.

The increase in supports I have provided from this month for the next programme year represents a major step towards accessible affordable quality childcare after decades of neglect and under-investment by successive Governments.

There are two supports being rolled out under the Community Childcare Scheme. These include universal non-means tested supports of up to €1,040 per year and enhanced supports of up to €7,500 per year to assist families to return to work, and/or training and education.

I am delighted with the strong response from the sector. The number of providers signing up to deliver the services increases daily.

My Department is monitoring the cost of childcare closely and will continue to do so. Initial research from a sampling of services shows that fee increases for full-term services delivering

the Community Childcare Scheme (including CCS Plus) rose by €5.26 on average between this programme year (2017/18) and the previous programme year. By way of comparison the fees across all services delivering full-time childcare rose by €7.26 between 2015/16 and 2016/17 following a number of years of price stagnation. If over the coming weeks or months those percentage increases in fees by service providers were to rise then I will consider whether actions such as regulation or price capping is required for government schemes.

Towards meeting some of the administrative overhead, I announced in recent months payments totalling €3.5 million towards “non contact time” for all childcare providers who register for the enhanced childcare measures under the Community Childcare Scheme. These payments range from €28 per child for the universal scheme up to as much as €203 per child registered on the more targeted supports. This, in addition to €14.5 million that has been already paid to childcare services so far in 2017 in recognition of administration associated with ECCE and other schemes, provides for €18 million in “non-contact time” payments this year.

The payment of €18 million this year in non contact payments should ensure that the availability of the supports to make childcare more affordable should not be a reason for any increase.

Family Resource Centres

1645. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase the funding made available to family resource centres through her Department’s family resource centre programme; her further plans to address the issue of pay disparity within the sector in view of the fact that it is hampering the ability of centres to recruit suitably qualified staff and fill existing vacancies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37218/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are over 100 Family Resource Centres currently in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provides funding to the centres under an annual Service Level Agreement. This funding is provided by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres. The 2017 Tusla allocation to Family Resource Centres is €13.512 million.

Family Resource Centres are independent companies limited by guarantee and they are managed by a Voluntary Board of Management which is representative of the local community. The centres operate independently of Tusla and each individual centre is responsible for the recruitment of employees and the terms and conditions under which they are employed.

Tusla fully appreciates the role that Family Resource Centres play in offering early intervention support to families in difficulty.

It is not possible at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be made available by Tusla to Family Resource Centres in 2018. This issue will be clarified in the context of the annual Estimates process and having regard to the overall level of funding available to Tusla in 2018.

Departmental Banking

1646. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost her Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if she

will make a statement on the matter. [37220/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The costs my Department incurred in each of the past five years due to credit and debit payment services and banking fees can be seen in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1: Credit Cards, 2012-2016:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Bank of Ireland	€381.63	€352.66	€395.38	€534.38	€707.43

Table 2: Bank Accounts, 2012-2016:

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Bank of Ireland	€0	€0	€34.26	€363.10	€222.20

My Department is currently examining ways to reduce charges in relation to credit cards and I expect a new system to be in place shortly. The bank account charges for 2014 to 2016 are also under review and are being queried.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

1647. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many child care providers have not signed up to provide the single affordable childcare scheme and the burden that this is placing on parents; and the steps she will take to address this issue. [37230/17]

1648. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that many persons will be unable to access the single affordable childcare scheme due to the fact there are no available places in crèches providing the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37231/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1647 and 1648 together.

On 11 April I made an announcement that the Affordable Childcare Scheme would not commence this September but that a range of measures would be introduced in September by my Department to make childcare more affordable for thousands of families throughout Ireland. This honours a key commitment in the Programme for Government.

As part of these ‘September measures’, a new universal subsidy is available for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age (or until they qualify for ECCE if later than 36 months) in registered childcare. This amounts to as much as €20 a week or €1,040 per year for children in full time childcare. The ‘September measures’ relates to the introduction of the Universal payment and the increase in band rates across the different strands of the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Scheme.

I am pleased to inform the Deputies that as of September 7 2792 services are in contract to provide CCS Plus.

This represents over 75% of eligible providers, based on the numbers of providers who have previously contracted with the Department (excluding those who only provide the ECCE

scheme). That number continues to rise.

I am keenly aware of the pressures on the sector with regard to availability of places and my Department has provided €8.4 million for its 2017 Early Years Capital funding programme. This represents a doubling of the €4 million provided under the 2016 Early Years Capital Funding Programme. This funding has been made available to early years providers under three strands, the largest of which (€4.2 million) will go towards enabling early years services to provide additional childcare places. The maximum grant available under Strand 1 is €50,000 which will allow for the full cost of a minor expansion project in an early years service, or for the purchase of a temporary structure. 89 projects have been approved for funding under Strand 1. In addition to this, my Department has also provided €4 million for its 2017 School Age Childcare Capital programme. This funding has been made available under three strands, and it is expected to create an additional 5,000 places. The maximum grant available under Strand A is €20,000 which is for the creation of new School Age childcare services, the maximum grant available under Strand B is €10,000 which is for the expansion of existing School age childcare services. 113 projects have been approved for funding under Strand A, while 112 projects have been approved for funding under Strand B.

My Department will also be conducting a review of capacity through the City and County Childcare Committees to identify where pressure points might exist, and based on this information will consider other possible measures to address these pressures.

I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality.

Domestic Violence Services Funding

1649. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding allocated to women's refuge accommodation in each of the past five years, and in 2017, in tabular form; and the number of families and persons who availed of these services for each of these years, and to date in 2017. [37454/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have requested information from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with this information.

Questions Nos. 1650 and 1651 answered with Question No. 1643.

Child Care Services

1652. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that children are missing out on child care in view of the fact that they must be three years of age to avail of a place and child-care providers will not hold places for children that turn three years of age during the school term post September; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37561/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy will be aware, the Early Childhood and Education (ECCE) Programme was expanded from September 2016 so that children may start free pre-school from age 3, and can continue in free pre-school once the child is not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the relevant pre-school year.

Three different points in the year - September, January and April – are in place to maximise access for these children within the overall eligibility parameters.

An upper age limit in free pre-school was set by the Inter-Departmental Group on Future Investment on the advice of the Department of Education and Skills. Limiting the diversity in age ranges in primary school is considered to be generally in the best interest of children, in relation to peer interaction in junior infants, as well as other educational considerations.

My Department does its best to ensure, in so far as is possible, the equitable treatment of all children and families who apply for childcare funding under the ECCE Programme. In order to ensure objectivity and fairness it is essential that clear rules exist for the scheme and that they are applied in a fair manner. The rules for all of the Department's childcare programmes are clearly published to ensure transparency and consistent application. An essential component of a programme's rules is an eligibility date to ensure that the programme can be administered and budgeted for in an appropriate manner.

Childcare providers are free to determine their own operational and enrolment policies. If parents are having difficulties finding an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) place in their area they should contact their local City/County Childcare Committee who will be in a position to assist parents in sourcing a place.

I am keenly aware of the pressures on the sector with regard to availability of places. My Department provided €8.4million for its 2017 Early Years Capital funding programme. This represents a doubling of the €4m provided under the 2016 Early Years Capital Funding Programme. This funding has been made available to early years providers under three strands, the largest of which (€4.2m) will go towards enabling early years services to provide additional childcare places. The maximum grant available under Strand 1 is €50,000 which will allow for the full cost of a minor expansion project in an early years service or the purchase of a temporary structure. 89 projects have been approved for funding under Strand 1. In addition to this, my Department has also provided €4 million for its 2017 School Age Childcare Capital programme. This funding has been made available under three strands, and it is expected to create an additional 5,000 places. The maximum grant available under Strand A is €20,000 which is for the creation of new School Age childcare services, the maximum grant available under Strand B is €10,000 which is for the expansion of existing school age childcare services. A total of 113 projects have been approved for funding under Strand A while 112 projects have been approved for funding under Strand B.

Child Care Services Regulation

1653. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the purpose of the proposal to submit child care providers' audited accounts to her Department and Pobal agents; the reason a Government body other than the Revenue Commissioners would be granted or need access to the financial information of private individual or self employed businesses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37577/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under Circular 13/2014, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) outline the responsibilities for both Grantors (the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) in this case) and Grantees (Childcare Providers in this case) in relation to expenditure of public funds by way of disbursement of grant funding to all bodies, including agencies, companies, committees, advisory groups, charities, or individuals, whether directly from the Votes of Government Departments/Offices or through an intermediary body or series of bodies. The Department endeavours

to comply insofar as possible, and is continuously seeking to improve practice in the childcare sector through constructive engagement.

The Grant Funding Agreement between the Department and childcare providers, which covers the various childcare programmes (ECCE, CCS, TEC), requires that Registered Childcare Providers shall separately account for public funds received and ensure that appropriate financial records are maintained to ensure compliance with the requirements of DPER Circular 13/2014.

The change this year, in terms of the financial requirements under the Grant Funding Agreement is that services will be required to provide copies of their annual accounts by default, to Pobal. The Grant Funding Agreement has *always* required services to keep up-to-date accounts, separately recording public monies, and to make these available on request to the Department or its agent(s).

HIQA Reports

1654. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the recent inspection report by HIQA on the foster care service operated by Tusla in the Cork service area, if her attention has been drawn to the fact that six of the eight standards assessed were non compliant, five of which were judged to be major non-compliances; the steps she will take to ensure future compliance; and if the necessary resources will be made available to meet standards of oversight and monitoring. [37616/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As part of its 2017 Monitoring Programme, the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) are conducting thematic inspections of Tusla's Foster Care Services. These inspections are announced in advance and cover eight standards in the National Standards for Foster Care, relating to the recruitment, assessment, approval, supervision and review of foster carers. The inspection report referred to by the Deputy was carried out under three themes, safe and effective services, leadership and governance, and use of resources. The inspection report found that of the eight standards assessed during the inspection, two standards were substantially compliant, one was non-compliant (moderate) and five standards were non-compliant (major).

The HIQA inspection report found a number of positives and noted that all of the children had an allocated social worker, there were examples of good practice in relation to safeguarding, and training programmes were available to assist foster carers in maintaining the necessary skills and knowledge required to provide high quality care. The standards that HIQA found were non-compliant (major) related to Theme 2, Safe and Effective Services, and Theme 5, Use of Resources. The issues identified by HIQA inspectors related to the recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers, the assessment and approval of foster carers, and the provision of supervision and support, training and reviews of foster carers. In the area of safeguarding and child protection, some of the inspection findings related to Garda vetting forms not being updated within the required timeframe, and the need for more consistent and better management of complaints and allegations made against foster carers. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provided an action plan addressing all the findings of the report, which was agreed with HIQA and published with the report.

Tusla has informed me that all cases raised by HIQA have been reviewed by the area. The inspection report noted that the number of link social workers was a factor in the issues identified by inspectors. Link social workers work directly in the recruitment and support of foster carers. Tusla filled two new permanent social work posts approved in 2016, and two further

permanent social workers are to be recruited in 2017. In the interim, two agency staff are in post since end of June 2017. Recommendations in respect of foster carers made by the Foster Care Committee will be actively followed through by the foster care link social worker and a progress report will be sent to the Foster Care Committee by the end of 2017, and annually thereafter.

Tusla has advised that it is committed to overseeing the implementation of the actions and has put in place an oversight group to monitor progress.

Child Care Services

1655. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to an organisation (details supplied); and if her attention has been further drawn to a proposal to set up operations in a specific location; and her views regarding same. [37617/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware that concerns have been raised in the community in question regarding a proposed Children's Residential Centre and I understand that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and the organisation in question have been in contact with local residents to discuss these concerns.

Under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla is charged with offering care and protection for children in circumstances where their parents have not been able to, or are unlikely to, provide the care that a child needs. One of their priorities is to provide safer, more reliable and effective services for children in care and to develop a range of placement options. Children's Residential Centres, such as the proposed centre in question, are one aspect of this important work.

When a child or young person comes into care, a number of decisions will be made in relation to where they will live, their ongoing education, the supports that they will receive, and the contact that they will have with their families. These decisions are documented in the child's care plan, which is tailored for the identified needs of the child. While a remote, rural location will not be suitable to every child or young person, I see nothing inherently wrong with having such placements available as part of a wide range of options for children in care across the country.

With regards to this particular centre, I would like to make it clear that the centre must register with Tusla before any young people will be placed there. Like all such centres, it will undergo thorough assessments to ensure that it fulfils its purpose and function, that it has satisfactory management and staffing in place and that it provides appropriate care, safeguarding and planning for the young people in its care. The requirements for placing a child or young person in a Children's Residential Centre and for the running of these centres are laid out in the Child Care (Placement of Children in Residential Care) Regulations 1995. All Children's Residential Centres are subject to statutory inspection against National Standards. HIQA are currently in the process of revising these standards.

I would also like to outline the important service provided by these residential centres for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. While foster care is the preferred form of alternative care in Ireland, sometimes this may not be the most appropriate option. A child or young person may instead be placed with Children's Residential Services. Of the 6308 children in care at the end of Q1 2017, 92% were in foster care, while 5.6% were in a general residential placement.

Children's Residential Services aim to provide a physically, emotionally and psychologically safe space in which children and young people can heal, develop and move forward in their lives. The vast majority of Children's Residential Centres nationally are community based which means the young people live in family-sized homes that look like any other house and are situated within the same estates and communities that everybody lives in. Where Children's Residential Services differ however, is that Centres are staffed on a twenty-four-hour basis by Social Care Workers, Leaders and Managers and are supported in their efforts to look after the children and young people in their care by external Managers, Social Work Services, Inspectors, Monitoring Officers and any others as appropriate.

I would like to acknowledge that scrutiny and oversight of the care provided to these children is of vital importance, and I welcome any concerns being raised. However, I am also very conscious of the stigma that children in care often face, through no fault of their own. It is important to emphasise that being taken into care is not a punishment for any wrongdoing on the part of a child, and Children's Residential Centres are not detention facilities. Children in care are some of the most vulnerable people in our society and it is of the utmost importance that these children and young people can be placed in a suitable environment that can cater for their needs, within a welcoming wider community.

Child Care Services

1655. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to an organisation (details supplied); and if her attention has been further drawn to a proposal to set up operations in a specific location; and her views regarding same. [37617/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware that concerns have been raised in the community in question regarding a proposed Children's Residential Centre and I understand that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and the organisation in question have been in contact with local residents to discuss these concerns.

Under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla is charged with offering care and protection for children in circumstances where their parents have not been able to, or are unlikely to, provide the care that a child needs. One of their priorities is to provide safer, more reliable and effective services for children in care and to develop a range of placement options. Children's Residential Centres, such as the proposed centre in question, are one aspect of this important work.

When a child or young person comes into care, a number of decisions will be made in relation to where they will live, their ongoing education, the supports that they will receive, and the contact that they will have with their families. These decisions are documented in the child's care plan, which is tailored for the identified needs of the child. While a remote, rural location will not be suitable to every child or young person, I see nothing inherently wrong with having such placements available as part of a wide range of options for children in care across the country.

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Question No. 1656 answered with Question No. 1643.

Early Years Sector

1657. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount allocated and drawn down in respect of the learner fund in 2016, and to date in 2017 in the Cavan and Monaghan and north Meath areas and right throughout the country in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37719/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Learner Fund was established to provide access to appropriate programmes of learning for Early Years sector workers.

The initial phases of funding released (Learner Funds 1, 2 and 3) focussed on those Early Years sector workers who lacked a qualification relevant to Early Childhood Care and Education or lacked a qualification in that area which was placed at, or equivalent to, Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). A relevant qualification which is placed at or equivalent to Level 5 on the NFQ is the minimum qualifications standard introduced through the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. This standard took effect at the end of 2016. The Learner Funds were introduced as part of a general focus on improving and supporting quality Early Years provision in Ireland, with a specific focus on aiding Early Years workers meet the regulatory requirements in advance of the introduction of same.

Up to the end of 2015, €3,052,648 in funding was allocated and paid through the Learner Funds.

Learner Fund 3 closed for applications in July of 2016. Learner Fund 4 was introduced to allow Early Years sector workers to up-skill to the relevant qualification placed at Level 6 on the NFQ, and closed in October of 2016.

Funding continues to be dispensed to successful applicants through both Learner Fund 3 and 4, and it is not envisaged that the full spend will be achieved until early 2018.

This Department expects to release further Learner Fund monies before the end of the year.

Applications for funding were made through local County / City Childcare Committees (CCC) and payments are being managed by Pobal, who administer the programme on behalf of DCYA in concert with the CCCs. Funding was allocated on the basis of the number of successful applications proposed for funding by each CCC and the spend reflects this.

The total budget for Learner Fund 3 was €406,283. Of this, payments totalling €203,550 were made prior to 2015. The remaining €205,550 was paid in 2016 and is broken down by county in the *Table A* overleaf.

In relation to Learner Fund 4, the total budget was €915,280. Of this, payments totalling €695,906 have been made for the years 2016/17 while € 219,374 has yet to be drawn down. A breakdown of payments by county to date is included in *Table B* overleaf.

In 2017, the Department made funding available to provide a bursary to childcare staff who had undertaken higher level courses (Level 7,8 or 9 on the NFQ) at their own expense. A breakdown of payments by county is included in *Table C* overleaf.

Table A

County	2016 Payment
Galway City and County Childcare	3,780
Donegal County Childcare Committee	0
Meath County Childcare Committee	11,095
Cavan County Childcare Committee	2,010
Fingal County Childcare Committee	17,670
Sligo County Childcare Committee	1,920
Longford County Childcare Committee	7,140
Carlow County Childcare Committee	4,100
Mayo County Childcare Committee	270
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	4,560
Louth County Childcare committee	0
Wexford County Childcare Committee	2,820
Offaly County Childcare Committee	2,940
Laois County Childcare Committee	3,060
South Dublin Childcare Committee	17,610
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CC	39,360
Kildare County Childcare Committee	16,875
Cork City Childcare Committee	0
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	2,430

Cork County Childcare Committee	7,530
Clare County Childcare Committee	1,320
Dublin City Childcare Committee	25,680
Kerry County Childcare Committee	6,900
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	2,820
Westmeath County Childcare Committee	4,800
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	4,230
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	1,100
Waterford Childcare Committee	1,020
Limerick County Childcare Committee	6,750
Tipperary Childcare Committee Limited	5,760

Table B

County	2016/17 Payment
Galway City and County Childcare	49,725
Donegal County Childcare Committee	9,900
Meath County Childcare Committee	35,798
Cavan County Childcare Committee	8,500
Fingal County Childcare Committee	56,340
Sligo County Childcare Committee	7,560
Longford County Childcare Committee	5,790
Carlow County Childcare Committee	8,850
Mayo County Childcare Committee	8,010
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	27,480
Louth County Childcare committee	29,835
Wexford County Childcare Committee	12,375
Offaly County Childcare Committee	9,000
Laois County Childcare Committee	25,425
South Dublin Childcare Committee	64,080
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CC	21,870
Kildare County Childcare Committee	44,468
Cork City Childcare Committee	11,790
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	16,065
Cork County Childcare Committee	34,875
Clare County Childcare Committee	18,608
Dublin City Childcare Committee	81,180
Kerry County Childcare Committee	16,950
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	1,155
Westmeath County Childcare Committee	18,938
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	9,999
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	7,000
Waterford Childcare Committee	9,923
Limerick County Childcare Committee	30,780
Tipperary Childcare Committee Limited	13,590

Table C

County	Paid 2017
Galway City and County Childcare Committee	45,750.00
Donegal County Childcare Committee	26,250.00
Meath County Childcare Committee	31,500.00
Cavan County Childcare Committee	9,000.00
Fingal County Childcare Committee	30,750.00
Sligo County Childcare Committee	11,250.00
Longford County Childcare Committee	3,000.00
Carlow County Childcare Committee	20,250.00
Mayo County Childcare Committee	21,000.00
Wicklow County Childcare Committee	39,000.00
Louth County Childcare committee	12,750.00
Wexford County Childcare Committee	21,750.00
Offaly County Childcare Committee	6,000.00
Laois County Childcare Committee	21,000.00
South Dublin Childcare Committee	30,000.00
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Childcare Committee	28,500.00
Kildare County Childcare Committee	45,000.00
Cork City Childcare Committee	10,500.00
Kilkenny County Childcare Committee	16,500.00
Cork County Childcare Committee	42,750.00
Clare County Childcare Committee	14,250.00
Dublin City Childcare Committee	50,250.00
Kerry County Childcare Committee	9,750.00
Leitrim County Childcare Committee	3,000.00
Westmeath County Childcare Committee	11,250.00
Monaghan County Childcare Committee	20,250.00
Roscommon County Childcare Committee	12,750.00
Waterford Childcare Committee	14,250.00
Limerick County Childcare Committee	12,750.00
Tipperary Childcare Committee Limited	20,250.00

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

1658. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount Tusla has spent on community programmes by county in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and the spending on family resource centres, school completion and area based childhood ABC programs by county. [37720/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the information below is a breakdown of funding by the ABC Programme showing each county as requested. ABC is a four year time bound prevention and early intervention initiative which is co-funded between my Department and the Atlantic Philanthropies for the period of 2013-2017.

ABC Programme	ABC Grant to 31/12/17	Development Funding	Total	County
Youngballymun	€5,635,090	-	€5,635,090	Dublin
Northside Partnership	€3,744,843	-	€3,744,843	Dublin
Tallaght West CDI	€4,926,750	-	€4,926,750	Dublin
Better Finglas	€1,328,927	-	€1,328,927	Dublin
Clondalkin Blueskies Initiative	€1,275,331	€43,969	€1,319,300	Dublin
Ballyfermot Partnership	€818,126	€25,686	€843,812	Dublin
DIT Grangegorman	€1,055,698	€25,000	€1,080,698	Dublin
NCI Early Learning Initiative	€1,516,620	-	€1,516,620	Dublin
Genesis Programme	€1,790,529	€12,850	€1,803,379	Louth
PAUL Partnership	€1,597,653	€21,265	€1,618,918	Limerick
SPECS Bray	€838,000	€6,804	€844,804	Wicklow
Young Knock-naheeny	€1,800,000	€25,000	€1,825,000	Cork
Total Allocation to ABC Sites	€26,327,567	€160,574	€26,488,141	

With regard to the School Completion Programme, the allocation for each of the years concerned has been €24.76m. Operational responsibility for the programme transferred to Tusla on its establishment in 2014.

I have referred the question to Tusla for direct response to the Deputy in relation to the remaining elements.

Guardians Ad Litem

1659. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount her Department has spent on guardian ad litem services broken down by county or provider. [37721/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As stated in my response to Deputy Anne Rabbitte on 25 July 2017, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has informed me that the total amount paid to guardians *ad litem* was €8,189,175 in 2015 and €6,569,115 in 2016. Supplementary information has now been received from Tusla, confirming the total amount paid to guardians *ad litem* for 2017, as of the end of July, to be €4,218,779. Tusla has advised me that as these costs are all posted to one Legal Office cost centre, it has not been possible to break down the costs by county. The following therefore is a breakdown, by vendor, of amounts paid for 2015, 2016, and year to date 2017:

Questions - Written Answers

GAL Costs	Actuals 2015	Actuals 2016	Actuals Ytd July 2017
BARNARDOS - BEACON	3,822,950	3,422,780	1,535,371
THE INDEPENDENT GUARDIAN AD LITEM	1,304,482	1,834,553	1,236,124
CEILI O'CALLAGHAN CONSULTANCY LTD	251,624	239,482	13,390
CHILD AND FAMILY CONSULTANCY LTD	272,096	237,330	111,366
CHILD FORENSIC SERVICES LTD	162,622	223,241	38,563
JIGSAW TRAINING SOLUTIONS LTD	268,305	209,451	148,636
CELBRIDGE COUNSELLING SERVICE	220,740	193,420	2,844
RENEE HANLEY	141,468	165,799	-33,501
MAEVE DRUMMEY	153,304	138,237	-13,365
CHILD ADVOCACY SERVICES	226,819	128,959	-39,704
NATIONAL CHILDRENS WELFARE SERVICES	171,574	114,499	143,899
JC GAL SERVICES LTD	94,174	101,102	93,830
SOCIAL WORK CONSULTANCY IRELAND LTD	114,513	92,462	13,142
PAT DONNELLY	34,402	68,100	23,505
SARAH TREACY	60,684	59,885	33,995
CARMEL MURPHY	245,259	55,861	46,202
INDEPENDENT SOCIAL WORK SERVICE	170,740	45,854	52,581
PATRICIA MCKAY LTD	59,841	44,699	
INDEPENDENT GUARDIAN AD LITEM SERVI	181,084	42,637	56,687
CLARE OHARE	34,026	29,542	

GAL Costs	Actuals 2015	Actuals 2016	Actuals Ytd July 2017
CLAIRE QUINN	307,465	27,128	
ANTHONY JAMES MACKLIN		25,691	33,055
MARY BIRD, GUARDIAN AD LITEM	15,981	18,893	5,943
PATRICIA MCKAY		12,000	25,182
CLAIRE OCON-NOR G.A.L. LTD		9,500	1,907
INDEPENDENT SOCIAL WORK	40,699	8,752	
TERESA MONICA SHANNON		5,306	6,472
CHRISTINE JEN-KINS	13,002	3,894	614
FOLEY CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES LTD		3,705	
JOHN P MURPHY	3,456		
ALPHA GUARDIAN AD-LITEM SERVICES	111,204		
LE CHEILE CHILDCARE SERVICES LTD	125,181		
RAYMOND MCEVOY	3,956		
MIKE RYAN - MDR CHILD AND FAMILY	26,368		-40,557
TMM GUARDIAN AD LITEM LTD	158,601		
DAVID KENNEDY T/A	117,415		
MARY O'SHEA T/A MARY MOLLOY	62,353		
CLEAR PARADIGMS			48,541
Net Accruals/Prepayments/Journals	-787,211	-993,650	674,056
GAL Costs Total	8,189,175	6,569,115	4,218,778

Please note the 2016 total includes accruals for refunds of VAT due from GAL vendors who had charged VAT in 2014 and 2015. The value of these refunds at end 2016 was €1,581,000. For 2017, due to VAT refunds relating to prior years invoicing, there is significant value of credit notes due to the Agency, which exceeded the value of the invoices submitted by GAL vendors.

Departmental Expenditure

1660. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the investment by her Department since March 2016 in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37723/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy might note that my Department provides funding under a range of programmes and schemes including Early Years, Early Childhood Care and Education, Youth Affairs and Participation. Details of funding provided directly by my Department to counties Cavan, Monaghan and Meath in the specified period are set out in the table. As some programmes issue funding by way of an annual grant, it is not possible to proportion it out from March 2016 onwards.

County/ Body	Investment
Cavan	€8.2m
Monaghan	€8.2m
Meath	€17.3m
Louth and Meath ETB	€0.4m
Cavan and Monaghan ETB	€0.3m
Cavan/Monaghan CYPSC	€0.02m

In reviewing the investment figures provided, the Deputy might also note that funding was provided as part of the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme, Capital Funding, Youth Work Function and the Youth Employee Initiative to Louth and Meath Education Training Boards (ETB) and Cavan and Monaghan ETB in the specified period. The distribution of funding between ETB counties is not available to my Department.

In addition, €0.02m was provided to Cavan/Monaghan CYPSC in November, 2016. Cavan/Monaghan CYPSC was separated into Cavan CYPSC and Monaghan CYPSC in 2017. Accordingly, the funding provided to both Cavan CYPSC and Monaghan CYPSC in 2017 is included in the figures for Cavan and Monaghan.

Information and Communications Technology

1661. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she has taken to upgrade the data collection systems in Tusla and in her Department. [37724/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department collects and disseminates a wide range of data in relation to children and young people.

From 2011-2016 the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children's Lives (NSRD-CL) guided and supported my Department's approach to the development of data relating to children's lives. The final implementation report on this strategy will be published later this year. Key actions relevant to data development and collection in my own Department under the Strategy include:

- The publication of the *State of the Nation's Children Report (SONC)* which presents a wide range of disaggregated administrative, survey and Census data on children and on factors relevant to children's lives. The 2016 report, the sixth in the biennial series, was published in March 2017.

- The development of the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF) Indicator Set by my

Department to track the progress of children and young people aged 0-24 across the five outcomes outlined in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF). A report on the indicator set is scheduled for publication during autumn 2017.

- My Department's ongoing commitment to and management of the Growing Up in Ireland Study: The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland. So far over 45 reports have been published by the GUI research team at the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin using the GUI data. GUI data are also used frequently by DCYA to inform policy development and service provision.

In addition, a data needs analysis is currently underway within my Department in line with the Government's Open Data Strategy, the results of which will contribute to the development of a proposal and project plan to support the implementation of a centralised departmental approach to the storage and management of data for monitoring, planning and evaluation purposes. This will also be the first phase towards fulfilment of Output 33 of the Department's Statement of Strategy, i.e. "a statistical data reporting system developed to support the work of the Department and its stakeholders".

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has recently announced the establishment of a new project, Outcomes for Children, National Data & Information Hub. Tusla requires optimum data management, utilising reliable data tools to ensure effective planning services for children. The project will ensure that Tusla can better fulfil its responsibilities by establishing state of the art data platforms through which it can plan its services.

The project will involve the building of an interactive area based geo mapping system to provide information for policy makers, service providers, Tusla management, practitioners, information managers and local communities so that planning and delivery of services are informed by the best available data.

It is being co funded between my Department and Tusla under the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI) and is being piloted with eleven Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) this year, with the aim of rolling it out across all CYPSC areas in subsequent years.

This project is a prime example of collaboration between different statutory bodies and stakeholders, and my Department is providing its full support to both Tusla and the CYPSC as they continue to improve the well being and outcomes for children in Ireland.

I have referred your question to Tusla to provide information on other steps taken to develop data collection within Tusla, for direct reply.

Social Workers Recruitment

1662. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the average time it takes to recruit social care workers in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath areas in 2016, and to date in 2017. [37725/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to inform the Deputy that I am advised by Tusla that their best practise planning allows for 16 weeks recruitment timeline. However, I am informed that individual campaigns may be completed in 8-20 weeks depending on outside factors, such as the candidate release dates and required documentation.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

1663. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the cost of the advertising campaign for the affordable childcare scheme. [37761/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): An information campaign to raise awareness among parents of the range of measures available to make childcare more affordable has been underway since late May. An additional €19m was secured as part of Budget 2017 and officials from my department and Pobal have worked hard to ensure that this money can have a positive impact by lowering the cost of childcare for Irish families from September of this year.

The comprehensive information campaign to raise awareness of the new measures among parents and childcare providers included two radio campaigns (nationwide and local), a targeted online and social media campaign, outdoor billboards nationwide and a Dublin Bus poster campaign. The total cost for this work has come in at just over €200,000.

At the time of writing this reply nearly 80% of eligible childcare providers have contracted to offer the scheme to parents; information on the supports available have been viewed nearly 420,000 times on the dedicated website over three months and more than 8,000 children have registered to receive these supports within the first week of registration.

Question No. 1664 answered with Question No. 1643.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

1665. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to crèches refusing to participate in the universal child care subsidy citing legal advice; the steps her Department is taking to address crèches concerns in respect of the contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37896/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality.

The increase in supports I have provided from this month for the next programme year represents a major step towards accessible affordable quality childcare after decades of neglect and under-investment by successive Governments.

There are two supports being rolled out under the Community Childcare Scheme. These include universal (non means tested) supports of up to €1,040 per year, and enhanced supports of up to €7,500 per year to assist families to return to employment and/or training and education.

I am pleased to inform the Deputies that as of 7 September 2792 services are in contract to provide CCS Plus.

This represents over 75% of eligible providers, based on the numbers of providers who have previously contracted with the Department (excluding those who only provide the ECCE scheme). That number continues to rise.

I am aware that some providers have expressed concerns around the administration of the new measures, I announced in recent months payments totalling €3.5 million towards “non-contact time” for all childcare providers who register for the enhanced childcare measures under the Community Childcare Scheme. These payments range from €28 per child for the uni-

versal scheme up to as much as €203 per child registered on the more targeted supports. This, in addition to €14.5m that has been already paid to childcare services so far in 2017 in recognition of administration associated with ECCE and other schemes, provides for €18m in “non-contact time” payments this year.

I am also aware that a small number of providers have expressed concerns about lack of clarity on contracts. Some have claimed the contracts have not yet been provided. Grant Agreements (which contain the terms and conditions) have been available to all providers since 19 May 2017. The 17/18 version of the rules of all childcare schemes were published on 24 July 2017. There were no fundamental changes made to the rules of the schemes, which were already familiar to providers through the previously named “DCYA Childcare Funding Programme Information and Frequently Asked Questions” document.

My Department will also be procuring an external consultant to prepare guidelines and support documents for providers in the coming months in order to assist the providers in meeting the financial reporting requirements as already laid out in the above documents.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

1666. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of crèches that have signed the contract for the new universal childcare subsidy; the number of contracts waiting to be processed by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37897/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that as of 7 September, 2,792 services are in contract to provide Community Childcare Scheme Plus (CCS Plus).

The Universal Provision along with the targeted provisions are provided under this arm of the Community Childcare Scheme.

This represents over 75% of eligible providers, based on the numbers of providers who have previously contracted with the Department (excluding those who only provide the ECCE scheme).

Any service who was previously in contract for any of my Department’s childcare schemes can renew their contract via an online system (“PIP”); this process is virtually instantaneous. The vast majority of providers are in this position.

A small number of providers are required to provide a paper based application to verify their eligibility; this verification includes a check that they have registered appropriately with Tusla as required under the childcare regulations. There are currently around 50 applications on hand with the Department, however as the applications are taken through the local City and County Childcare Committees there may be additional applications in process. My Department works to ensure that these applications are turned around as quickly as possible.

Early Childhood Care and Education Programmes

1667. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when an AIM Level 7 will be approved for a child in a day care centre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37966/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a programme of supports to enable children with a disability to access and meaningfully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme and is administered by Pobal on behalf of my Department. The degree of support provided depends on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school service they are attending.

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

I understand that the AIM Level 7 application in respect of this child has been assessed by the Early Years Specialist and is with Pobal for appraisal. A decision is expected to be communicated to the parents and pre-school provider within the coming week.

Brexit Issues

1668. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37986/17]

1669. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38002/17]

1684. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38688/17]

1685. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38704/17]

1686. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38720/17]

1687. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the scenario planning that has been conducted by her department for Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38736/17]

1688. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38752/17]

1689. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the

funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38768/17]

1690. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38800/17]

1691. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of vacancies in her Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38816/17]

1692. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38832/17]

1693. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with her Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38848/17]

1694. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by her Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38880/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1668, 1669, and 1684 to 1694, inclusive together.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach" published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in a comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

With regards to my own Department, in January of this year, I hosted a sectoral dialogue with children, young people and key stakeholders in Croke Park at which the views of all interested parties were captured. Since then, the Advisory Council to Better Outcomes Brighter Futures; the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020 has considered the report of the event and work is ongoing in relation to the more detailed implications of Brexit. Furthermore, matters in relation to Brexit were discussed by over 100 children and young people in April of this year as part of the annual regional Comhairle na nÓg Networking events. This has enabled my Department to table those issues which may impact on children and young people, post-Brexit, and indeed identify those issues which resonate most strongly with our youngest citizens.

However, it must be stated that such matters are subsets of much larger items which will be considered, in the main, in conjunction with colleagues in the Departments of Finance, Justice and Equality, Education and Health as part of the wider negotiating process. Accordingly, given the limited impact of Brexit on my Department, there is not the requirement to resource a dedicated Brexit Unit. However, while a dedicated unit is not needed, my Department continues to engage with all relevant structures and communication channels – coordinated by the Department of An Taoiseach.

Construction Costs

1670. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by her Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which she monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms her Department employs to establish this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38018/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy may be aware that the only construction project for which my Department has responsibility is the Oberstown Children Detention Campus. The construction related works on this project are substantially managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW), which operates through framework/drawdown arrangements with service providers. The OPW would therefore be the more

appropriate body to comment on any issues arising with regard to construction inflation linked to those works.

Public Services Card

1671. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she or bodies and agencies under the remit of her Department plans to make services or payments dependant on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependant on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38142/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the only scheme where consideration is being given to the use of the Public Service Card is in the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS). The ACS was announced as part of budget 2017 as a new national scheme of financial support for parents towards the cost of their childcare. It will replace the existing targeted childcare subsidisation schemes, which are:

1. the Community Childcare Subvention Programme (CCS)
2. the Childcare Education and Training Support Programme (CETS),
3. the After-School Childcare Programme (ASCC)
4. the Community Employment Childcare Programme (CEC).

The system to administer the ACS is being built. It will enable parents to apply on-line. It is imperative that this is a secure system to support strong data protection and in-built checks. It is intended that the MyGovID System will be used as the authentication mechanism to provide access to the ACS. MyGovID is the SAFE 2 registered online verification of the Public Services Card. Applicants should be SAFE 2 registered in order to make an application to access the scheme. In order to support a user-friendly process, this online system will involve linkages to Revenue and Department of Social Protection IT databases, which should enable automated verification of income data and automated approval of applications in a large number of cases. This will reduce the administrative burden associated with the application and approval process and make the scheme more accessible to families.

With regard to the bodies under the aegis of my Department, I am informed that the Adoption Authority of Ireland has no plans to make any of their services dependent on the use of the public service card. I have referred the question to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for direct reply to the Deputy.

Family Resource Centres

1672. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review the funding provided through Tusla for family resource centres (details supplied); if she will make additional funding available as part of budget 2018 which would provide for an equitable treatment of family resource centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38184/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are over 100 Family Resource Centres currently in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provides funding to the centres under an annual Service Level Agreement. This

funding is provided by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres. The 2017 Tusla allocation to Family Resource Centres is €13.512m.

Family Resource Centres are independent companies limited by guarantee and they are managed by a Voluntary Board of Management which is representative of the local community. The centres operate independently of Tusla and each individual centre is responsible for the recruitment of employees and the terms and conditions under which they are employed.

Tusla fully appreciates the role that Family Resource Centres play in offering early intervention support to families in difficulty.

It is not possible at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be made available by Tusla to Family Resource Centres in 2018. This issue will be clarified in the context of the annual Estimates process and having regard to the overall level of funding available to Tusla in 2018.

Family Resource Centres

1673. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she with Tusla will review funding of a group (details supplied) in Dublin 22; if the funding model for this group will be reviewed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38185/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are over 100 Family Resource Centres currently in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Tusla provides funding to the centres under an annual Service Level Agreement. This funding is provided by way of a contribution towards the running costs of the centres. The 2017 Tusla allocation to Family Resource Centres is €13.512m.

In 2015, the Centre referred to by the Deputy received funding from Tusla of €83,950. This funding was increased to €86,478 in 2016. At the end of 2016, the Centre received a once-off grant of €30,000 for the upgrade of equipment and infrastructure. The Centre was also provided with a once-off payment at the end of 2016 to offset financial difficulties.

Tusla is providing funding of €86,478 to the centre in 2017. An additional €8,000 has also been allocated to the Centre in 2017 in order to fund counselling and play therapy services, which is a new and very welcome initiative.

Tusla fully appreciates the role that Family Resource Centres play in offering early intervention support to families in difficulty.

It is not possible at this stage to advise on what level of funding will be made available by Tusla to Family Resource Centres in 2018. This issue will be clarified in the context of the annual Estimates process and having regard to the overall level of funding available to Tusla in 2018.

Child Care Services

1674. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to provide further supports to parents that opt to stay at home from work to mind their children rather than placing their children with child minding services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38216/17]

1675. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the supports available for parents that choose to stay at home to care for their children; the new and additional supports she plans to provide to assist these parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38233/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1674 and 1675 together.

I am committed to the provision of childcare options for families that respect parental choice and reflect international evidence on how to attain the best outcomes for children. While operational responsibility for these do not fall within my policy remit as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I support the extension of parental leave for parents; particularly in the crucial first year.

The Government has provided additional support for parents who choose to care for their children at home by increasing the Home Carer Tax Credit to €1,100 per year in budget 2017, as well as provisions for maternity benefit, parental leave and the recently introduced paternity leave. I support an increase in the earnings threshold for this, and have raised this with the Minister for Finance. It should be noted that the Programme for Government commits to extending paid leave for parents in the first year of a child's life, which will be a key financial support enabling parents to care for their children at home in the critical first year.

The measures currently being rolled out across the country to make childcare more affordable are an important first step in making childcare more accessible for parents who choose to return to training or employment. However, it is important to recognise that these measures and those that will commence once the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) is up and running are only one element of a broader set of commitments and supports aimed at parents and children. The provision of improved services for centre-based care is very important, but I will not lose sight of the needs of children who do not attend them. In this regard, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. The intention is to deliver a cross-cutting strategy which will take a joined-up, whole of Government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years (0-6 years). The drafting of the National Early Years Strategy is well advanced. In December 2016 I hosted an Open Policy Debate on the strategy with a view to completion of the strategy this year.

My Department presently provides a number of childcare schemes which are available to all families, both working parents and parents who choose to stay at home to care for their children. The ECCE free pre-school programme has been extended from September 2016 - children's eligibility for ECCE has increased from 38 weeks for all children, to an average of 61 weeks (ranging from 51 to 88 weeks depending on date of birth and age starting school) and is universally available. The Affordable Childcare Scheme, once launched will also be open for all families, whether or not they are in employment.

Child Protection

1676. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason for the delay in the publication of the inquiry conducted by a person (details supplied) and concluded in July 2016 into child protection issues in counties Laois and Offaly; when it will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38251/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have referred

this question to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for direct response to the Deputy.

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

1677. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount spent by Tusla each year on consultancy fees; the persons or bodies to which payments were made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38252/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested by the Deputy is an operational matter for Tusla and as such is not readily available in my Department. I have requested that Tusla forward the information concerned directly to the Deputy.

Data Protection

1678. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she has taken to satisfy herself that data protection and privacy standards have been complied with in the context of child abuse allegations being notified by the HSE to Tusla via fax; the reason this system is in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38253/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Compliance with data protection and privacy standards, in the context of the Deputy's question, is a matter for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and the Health Service Executive (HSE). I have referred the question to Tusla for direct response to the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Data

1679. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the annual percentage of non-commercial State sponsored bodies staff under the remit of her Department that were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38357/17]

1680. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the annual percentage of public service staff that were women under the remit of her Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38380/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1679 and 1680 together.

Since the establishment of my department in June, 2011, I can confirm that the annual percentage of public service staff that were women in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, is as follows:

Year	No. of Employees	Female	% of Employees that are Female
2017	227	142	63%
2016	188	123	65%
2015	162	106	65%
2014	158	106	64%

2013	150	99	66%
2012	144	95	66%

With regard to the four agencies under the aegis of my Department, I can confirm matters are as follows; *Oberstown Children Detention Campus*

Year	No. of Employees	No. of Females	% of Employees that are Female
2017	300	143	48%
2016	289	133	46%
2015	238	108	45%
2014	217	100	46%
2013	190	88	46%
2012	189	88	47%
2011	189	88	47%
2010	187	85	45%

Adoption Authority of Ireland

Year	No. of Employees	No. of Females	% of Employees that are Female
2017	23	15	65%
2016	24	15	62.5%
2015	20	14	70%
2014	10	7	70%
2013	6	4	67%
2012*	1	1	100%

*Year of Establishment.

Tusla

Tusla was established in January 2014, and as such there are no figures available for the Agency before this date.

Year	No. of Employees	No. of Females	% of Employees that are Female
2017 (30 June)	4663	3838	82.30%
2016	4547	3766	82.82%
2015	4332	3627	83.72%
2014	4174	3528	84.52%

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

Family Resource Centres

1681. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the allocation to family resource centres over each of the past ten years. [38401/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Acting as a focal point within their communities, Family Resource Centres provide a holistic service of child, family and community support and advocacy to all children and families in their communities.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency provides funding to over 100 Family Resource Centres. The 2017 allocation by Tusla to Family Resource Centres is €13.512m.

It should be noted that prior to 2014, funding was provided to the Family Resource Centres by the former Family Support Agency, which was incorporated into Tusla in 2014.

The table below sets out the level of funding provided to Family Resource Centres in the period 2008 - 2017.

Family Support Agency/ Tusla Funding to Family Resource Centres 2008-2017

Years	Tusla Funding provided to Family Resource Centres (€m)
2008	18.84
2009	18.05
2010	15.37
2011	15.90
2012	15.10
2013	14.31
2014	13.51
2015	13.09
2016	13.5
2017	13.512

Source: Family Support Agency (2006 – 2013) / Child and Family Agency (2014 – 2017)

In 2016, additional once off funding of €1.422m was provided to Family Resource Centres to assist in the upgrade of equipment and infrastructure.

Early Years Sector

1682. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will pay a capital grant to a provider (details supplied) to allow it to open a replacement preschool facility as soon as possible; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38563/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The service to which the Deputy refers has not made an application for capital funding under the early years capital scheme, 2017. As the deadline for this has now passed, it will not be possible to facilitate an application at this stage.

Pobal and the local City Childcare Committee (CCC) have been in contact with the service in question and it is my understanding that this service is currently closed. It is also my understanding that until a suitable premises has been found this service will not be in a position to reopen. In this regard, the CCC will continue to support this service in any way they can.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Data

1683. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding provided in her Department's estimates for 2017 for the affordable childcare scheme; the percentage of childcare providers that are participating in the scheme; the projected expenditure to the end of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38684/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme was profiled for €42m in the 2017 estimates. On 11th April I made an announcement that the Affordable Childcare Scheme would not commence this September but that a range of measures would be introduced in September by my Department to make childcare more affordable for thousands of families throughout Ireland. This honours a key commitment in the Programme for Government.

As part of these 'September measures', a new universal subsidy is available for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age (or until they qualify for ECCE if later than 36 months) in registered childcare. This amounts to as much as €20 a week or €1,040 per year for children in full time childcare. The 'September measures' are currently estimated to cost €12.4m to the end of 2017. This figure relates to the introduction of the Universal payment and the increase in band rates across the different strands of the Community Childcare Scheme (CCS).

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that as of 7th September, 2,792 services are in contract to provide Community Childcare Scheme Plus (CCS Plus). The Universal Provision along with the targeted provisions are also provided under this arm of the CCS. This represents over 75% of eligible providers, based on the numbers of providers who have previously contracted with the Department (excluding those who only provide the ECCE scheme). Any service who was previously in contract for any of my Department's childcare schemes can renew their contract via an online system ("PIP"); this process is virtually instantaneous. The vast majority of providers are in this position.

Questions Nos. 1684 to 1694, inclusive, answered with Question No. 1668.

Departmental Expenditure

1695. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38896/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The mid-year expenditure report sets out the pre-Budget expenditure ceiling for my Department of €1,285 million for current expenditure and €27 million for capital expenditure. This represents the spending baseline for examination of my Department's budgetary priorities for 2018. This is in line with the allocation for my Department in 2017.

At present officials in my Department are engaged on the estimates and budgetary process for 2018. I am sure that the Deputy will appreciate that it would be inappropriate to comment at this time on any future decisions that may be taken by Government in the context of Budget 2018 on the expenditure allocations for programmes and services within my Department.

Child Protection Services Provision

1696. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of the 5,893 unallocated cases, 991 of which they deemed high priority, mentioned in the June 2017 Tusla activity report that relate to section 3 referrals. [38919/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that the Child Care Act, 1991, as amended, is the central piece of legislation regarding the care and welfare of children. The Act is the basis for providing child welfare and protection service, receiving children into care, developing aftercare plans, and the provision of alternative care, e.g. foster care, residential centres.

Section 3 of the Child Care Act requires Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and attention, and to identify such children. Overall, 40% of referrals to Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Services are related to children with high levels of need arising from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and 60% to neglect and welfare concerns. Tusla received 47,399 referrals in 2016, a 9% increase on referrals in 2015.

Under the provisions of Section 3 Tusla is required to access allegations of historical abuse made by adults in order to establish if there are children currently at risk.

I can advise that, in this context, all of the 5,893 unallocated cases to which the Deputy refers relate to Section 3 of the Child Care Act. However, this figure refers to child protection and welfare referrals where the risk is identified as current.

Tusla also receives historical/retrospective abuse referrals, where the focus is on establishing if there are children currently at risk. These referrals are recorded separately.

Adoption Legislation

1697. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to allow adopted persons access their personal files and information regarding their adoption and origins; when she plans to allow adopted persons such access; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38938/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 provides for the first time a statutory entitlement to identity information for adopted persons. It provides for a structured and regulated access to information and tracing services for those affected by adoption. It sets out the information that can be provided and the circumstances in which it can be provided to adopted persons. A key provision in the Bill provides that an adopted person aged 18 years or over who was adopted prior to commencement of the Bill will be provided with the information required to apply for his or her birth certificate, subject to certain conditions. The Bill also provides for access to relevant records containing the information concerned that are held by the Authority. The Bill passed Second Stage in Seanad Éireann in May 2017 and will proceed to Committee Stage in the Seanad as soon as possible.

Child Abuse

1698. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of section 3 adult retrospective reports of abuse cases that are currently unallocated; the year when first referred in view of the evidence which emerged at the Charleton tribunal in relation to a

person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38957/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A historical or retrospective disclosure is where an adult discloses abuse experienced in childhood. I understand that the overwhelming majority of such disclosures are about sexual abuse. Tusla has advised me that at the end of June, there were 1,898 open cases of historical abuse of which 1,326 (70%) were allocated and 572 (28%) were awaiting allocation.

Of the 572 awaiting allocation 24 (4%) were active on duty. This means that there are actions being undertaken by a dedicated duty team or rotating social workers on a duty roster to progress the protection and welfare of the child.

Of those 572 awaiting allocation, length of time awaiting allocation is as follows:

< 1 week	8
1-2 weeks	26
2-3 weeks	18
3-4 weeks	23
1-2 months	97
2-3 months	115
>3 months	285
Total	572

I have asked Tusla to write to the Deputy directly regarding the length of time cases on the list for more than 3 months have been waiting.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Expenditure

1699. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the promised assessment of the economic costing of child care services; and the timeframe for completion of this work. [38996/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I understand that the Deputy is referring to the 'Independent Review of the Cost of Delivering Quality Childcare' which will be commissioned in the coming weeks. Once commissioned there will be a 10-month deadline to deliver findings. Officials in my Department have been scoping the research that will be involved and preparing terms of reference for the study. In this regard a Request for Tenders (RFT) was issued on 4 August. The independent review seeks to: analyse the current costs of providing childcare in Ireland and factors that impact on those costs; develop a model of the unit cost/costs of providing childcare that allows analysis of policy changes and variation in cost-drivers, including the potential impact of increased professionalisation; provide an objective, high level market analysis of the childcare sector in Ireland, including analysis of fee levels charged to parents; and provide a range of outputs as specified in the Request for Tenders.

It is anticipated that the independent review will be a key input in informing future decisions on policy development and funding of childcare schemes, including both the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) free pre-school programme and the Affordable Childcare Scheme, and will finally help us build a sustainable quality childcare sector in Ireland.

Post Office Network

1700. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to facilitate a greater share of the banking market here by post offices through the facilitation of a community banking service comparable to a model (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37620/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, based on overseas models, which could potentially be delivered, *inter alia*, through the post office network.

My officials have been working actively with the Department of Finance over the last number of months to progress these commitments. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies were received from a range of stakeholders and all submissions have been reviewed and considered.

My officials, along with Department of Finance officials, also met with the Sparkassen Foundation for International Co-operation in relation to the German Sparkassen model in particular, and obtained detailed information from that organisation.

The Departmental officials are currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a local public banking model in Ireland. Their work is now nearing completion and a report will be submitted to me and to the Minister for Finance shortly for consideration.

Rural Recreation Scheme

1701. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation of funding under the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme in each of the years 2006 to 2017. [37674/17]

1750. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation under the rural recreation scheme each year since it was established; and the amount of funding sought under the scheme. [38420/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1701 and 1750 together.

I introduced the Rural Recreation Scheme as a formal programme in 2016; it was re-titled the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme in 2017. The scheme supports the development and promotion of new recreational facilities and the maintenance of existing recreational infrastructure throughout rural Ireland.

I understand that prior to 2016, funding in relation to this type of intervention was done on a case-by-case basis with submissions made by relevant stakeholders involved in promoting and maintaining walks and trails across Ireland. Some small amounts were allocated on the basis of these submissions, but there was no formal scheme in place and no defined allocation.

In 2016, 221 applications were received under the scheme, requesting total funding of €17.6 million. A total of €7.4 million was approved for 117 projects.

The 2017 scheme was launched last April, with applications invited under three Measures:

Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing

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

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

376 applications for funding were received under these measures, with a total value in excess of €27 million. To date, 219 projects with a value of €11.4 million have been approved under measures 1 and 3, and these will be implemented over a 15 month period. Successful projects under measure 2 have yet to be announced.

The number of projects approved for funding each year is contingent on the budgetary provision available.

Library Projects

1702. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding works on a site (details supplied) in Castleblayney; when these works are likely to begin; the amount which has been allocated; when works will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37739/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The provision of premises and facilities in the public library service is generally a matter for each local authority in its capacity as a library authority.

Notwithstanding this, my Department is providing approximately €20 million under the Libraries Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021 to support 16 priority capital projects submitted by local authorities. The programme includes the development of a new library for Monaghan Town, which was submitted as a priority proposal by Monaghan County Council. Castleblayney Library was not submitted as a priority proposal and, accordingly, was not considered for funding under the programme.

Accordingly, the development of Castleblayney Library will be a matter to be progressed primarily by Monaghan County Council. My Department continues to engage with Monaghan County Council on the proposal, which I understand is at the very early stages of design. Monaghan County Council has been advised that this proposal and all other proposals on hand for funding will be reconsidered should additional capital monies become available.

Seniors Alert Scheme

1703. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the senior alert scheme each year since it was established. [38448/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The objective of the Seniors Alert Scheme is to encourage support for vulnerable older people in our communities through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the Scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of equipment, i.e. a personal alarm and/or pendant, which is provided to the elderly person participating, while the associated monitoring and service charges are the responsibility of the individual participant.

The Scheme commenced in 2010, replacing Scheme of Community Support for Older People. The funding provided each year from 2010 to 2016 and allocated in 2017 is outlined in the

table.

Year	Amount €'000s
2010	1,948
2011	2,436
2012	2,524
2013	2,321
2014	1,706
2015	1,539
2016	1,800
2017	2,300

Rural Recreation Scheme

1704. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the walks scheme in the past ten years; and the number of walks which this funded in the past ten years, in tabular form. [38515/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department administers the Walks Scheme which was launched in March 2008. The scheme was an innovative response to facilitating the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's key walking trails. The key aspect of the Scheme is that it includes landholders as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. The landholders received modest payments for maintenance work undertaken in line with agreed work plans.

A total of 39 trails are currently covered by the scheme and the number of participants in the scheme currently stands at 1,904. Payments in respect of the scheme are disbursed through the Local Development Company network.

The table outlines the funding made available to the Walks scheme, and the number of walks funded, since its inception in 2008. It includes funding for all aspects of the scheme including participant payments and other ancillary costs.

Walks Scheme Expenditure 2008-2017.

Year	Number of walks	Expenditure
2008	14	€1,159,049
2009	29	€2,117,282
2010	40	€2,637,247
2011	40	€2,683,461
2012	40	€2,645,590
2013	39	€2,518,415
2014	39	€2,519,136
2015	39	€2,573,394
2016	39	€2,497,234
2017	39	€2,481,742
Total		€23,832,550

CLÁR Programme

1705. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will allocate further funds to the CLÁR programme in view of the fact many applications had to be refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36935/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31 March last with a closing date of 5 May. Funding under the programme was available through four separate measures:

Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure

Measure 4: First Responder Supports

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

Funding to support projects under CLÁR this year was limited and it was not possible to fund all applications. In general, applications were assessed on the basis of their eligibility under the scheme criteria and on the quality of the documentation supporting their proposals. A total of just under €7 million was allocated to 231 successful projects.

All funding available under the CLÁR programme for 2017 has now been allocated and I currently have no plans to assign further funding to the programme this year.

Departmental Staff Data

1706. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37271/17]

1707. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of men and women respectively in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [37272/17]

1742. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the annual percentage of non-commercial State sponsored bodies staff under the remit of his department that were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38367/17]

1744. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of his Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38390/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1706, 1707, 1742 and 1744 together.

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established following the enactment of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2017 on 19 July 2017.

Functions transferred to my Department include the Rural Division from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Community Division from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Charities Regulatory Authority from the Department of Justice and Equality.

We are also in the process of assessing the required needs of my Department with regards to corporate resourcing.

Negotiations are on-going with these Departments and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to determine the final staffing compliment of my Department.

This will be finalised in due course and I will provide the deputy with a full breakdown of requested information on completion of this process.

Departmental Banking

1708. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37273/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Rural and Community Development was established following the enactment of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2017 on 19 July 2017.

Functions transferred to my Department include the Rural Division from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Community Division from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Charities Regulatory Authority from the Department of Justice and Equality.

Details of financial transaction costs for these divisions for the past five years, prior to 19 July 2017, will be available within data held by these Departments.

The financial management arrangements for my Department (including transitional provisions) are being progressed in co-operation with the finance divisions of the transferring departments.

Living Wage

1709. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the cost of implementing a living wage of €11.70 for all persons directly employed or in agencies funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37274/17]

1710. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the cost of implementing a living wage of €11.70 for all employees directly employed or in agencies funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37275/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1709 and 1710 together.

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established following the enactment of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2017 on 19 July 2017.

Functions transferred to my Department include the Rural Division from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Community Division from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Charities Regulatory Authority from the Department of Justice and Equality.

We are also in the process of assessing the required needs of my Department with regards to corporate resourcing.

Negotiations are on-going with these Departments and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to determine the final staffing compliment of my Department.

This will be finalised in due course and I will provide the deputy with a full breakdown of requested information on completion of this process.

Action Plan for Rural Development

1711. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the supports available from his Department for owners of buildings in regional and rural towns in which the full building is not being used for commercial or residential purposes and could be used for housing if the upper stories of the building could be renovated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37276/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

An enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13th April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. It is envisaged that this scheme will support up to 300 towns and villages over the next 12 months.

My officials have separately been examining the potential for developing a pilot scheme to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. The pilot will consider ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town centres can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purposes. This will help to rejuvenate town centres while also helping to contribute to the housing needs of individuals.

The initiative is being developed in consultation with relevant Departments.

CLÁR Programme

1712. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the CLÁR programme in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of projects funded each year under the programme, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37277/17]

1747. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the CLÁR programme each year since 2011; and the number of projects funded under the programme. [38417/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1712 and 1747 together.

The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. CLÁR was effectively closed to new applications from 2010 and any funding provided over the period 2011-2015 was in respect of commitments made prior to 2010.

I re-launched the CLÁR programme in 2016, and €8.293 million was allocated to 651 successful projects last year.

The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched in March of this year, with a closing date of 5 May. In total, more than 500 applications were received and 231 successful projects were approved for funding, to a value of just under €7 million.

Table 1 provides details of the total funding provided and/or allocated through the CLÁR programme each year from 2011 to 2017. All funding provided over the period 2011-2015 was in respect of earlier commitments made under different Departmental configurations.

Table 1 – Funding provided under the CLÁR programme 2011-2015

Year	Funding provided/approved (€)	Number of Projects
2011	348,000	N/A
2012	91,000	N/A
2013	105,000	N/A
2014	49,253	N/A
2015	0	N/A
2016	8,238,866	651
2017	6,912,350	231

Action Plan for Rural Development Funding

1713. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding allocation to the rural renovation scheme; the number of projects funded under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37278/17]

1748. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the rural renovation scheme for each year since it has been established. [38418/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1713 and 1748 together.

The Government's Action Plan for Rural Development contains a number of measures which have the objective of rejuvenating Ireland's rural towns and villages to make them more attractive places in which to live and work, and to increase their tourism potential.

An enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13th April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. It is envisaged that this scheme will support up to 300 towns and villages over the next 12 months.

My officials have separately been examining the potential for developing a pilot scheme to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. The pilot will consider ways in which properties that are currently not in use in town and village centres can be renovated to allow them to be used for residential purposes. This will further help to rejuvenate town centres

while also contributing to the housing needs of individuals.

The initiative is being developed in consultation with relevant Departments.

Departmental Functions

1714. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the date the transfer order pertaining to the functions of his Department will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37279/17]

1725. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the functions transferred to his Department from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and other Departments since the passing of the legislation enabling the setting up of his Department; the funding that has been transferred to date to his department; the number, grade and location of all staff working for his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37291/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1714 and 1725 together.

The Department of Rural and Community Development was established following the enactment of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2017 on 19 July 2017.

Functions transferred to my Department include the Rural Division from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Community Division from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the Charities Regulatory Authority from the Department of Justice and Equality.

These functions, including the associated budgets and programmes, were transferred via the following Statutory Instruments:

No.348 of 2017 - Charities (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017,

No. 354 of 2017 - Rural Affairs (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017, and

No. 357 of 2017 - Community Development (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017.

The Department is in the process of assessing its required needs with regards to corporate resourcing. Negotiations are ongoing with the above named Departments and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to determine the final staffing compliment of my Department.

This will be finalised in due course and I will provide the Deputies with a full breakdown of requested information on completion of this process.

CLÁR Programme

1715. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications made per county to the CLÁR programme; the number of local authorities that have written seeking additional funding; the amount of funding granted by county, in

tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37280/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31 March last, with a closing date of 5 May. Funding for the programme was available this year under four separate Measures:

Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures

Measure 2: Play Areas

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure

Measure 4: First Responder Supports

Over 500 applications were received across the four Measures to the value of €15 million.

Funding to support projects under CLÁR this year was limited and it was not possible to fund all applications. In general, applications were assessed on the basis of their eligibility under the scheme criteria and on the quality of the documentation supporting their proposals.

A total of 231 successful projects were approved for funding, with a total allocation of just under €7 million across the four Measures. While individual projects may have been disappointed not to have received funding, I am not aware that any Local Authority has written seeking additional funding under the CLÁR Programme.

Table 1 outlines the number of applications received by county under the CLÁR programme in 2017, together with the number of successful projects and the amount of funding approved.

Table 1 - CLÁR 2017: Number of Projects and funding approved by county

County	Total No. of applications received	No. of successful projects	Amount Approved
Carlow	5	5	€178,760
Cavan	29	12	€310,182
Clare	21	10	€351,733
Cork	27	9	€260,916
Donegal	36	10	€245,482
Galway	28	15	€611,539
Kerry	29	8	€261,173
Kilkenny	15	4	€161,932
Laois	20	5	€51,395
Leitrim	21	17	€486,153
Limerick	24	10	€180,533
Longford	24	12	€283,467
Louth	20	10	€245,869
Mayo	29	22	€879,882
Meath	11	4	€104,000
Monaghan	22	16	€594,338
Offaly	22	9	€186,954
Roscommon	22	12	€372,441
Sligo	23	9	€351,216
Tipperary	25	15	€250,714

County	Total No. of applications received	No. of successful projects	Amount Approved
Waterford	28	10	€329,549
Westmeath	24	3	€81,097
Wicklow	16	4	€133,025
Total	521	231	€6,912,350

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

1716. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the projects funded under the town and village scheme, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37281/17]

1717. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications received under the town and village renewal scheme; the amount of funding sought; the number that received funding for 2016, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37282/17]

1749. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the town and village renewal scheme each year since it has been established; and the amount of funding sought by local authorities under the scheme. [38419/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1716, 1717 and 1749 together.

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in August 2016 as part of the Government's programme to support rural development. A budget of €10 million was made available for the scheme in 2016 and, from this budget, a sum of €380,000 was made available to each of the 26 counties.

Local Authorities, in conjunction with local communities and businesses, were invited to submit up to 8 proposals each from within that allocation, for approval. A total of 170 projects were approved in 2016 and the table below shows the number of projects funded on a county basis. A listing of all successful projects in 2016 can be found on my Department's website at <http://drcd.gov.ie/subheader1/town-village-renewal-scheme/>.

An enhanced Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13th April this year, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. It is envisaged that €20 million in funding will be invested in supporting projects in up to 300 towns and villages over the next 12 months.

Selection of projects will be by means of a competitive process. Local Authorities were asked to consult with community and business interests in towns and villages in their areas and to submit up to 15 proposals for consideration by my Department.

The assessment process in respect of the 2017 scheme is nearing completion and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects shortly.

Table 1 - Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2016:

Number projects approved by county

County	No. of projects funded
Carlow	7
Cavan	7
Clare	4
Cork	8
Donegal	5
Dublin (Fingal)	7
Galway	8
Kerry	6
Kildare	6
Kilkenny	4
Laois	7
Leitrim	8
Limerick	8
Longford	8
Louth	8
Mayo	4
Meath	8
Monaghan	8
Offaly	4
Roscommon	8
Sligo	4
Tipperary	5
Waterford	6
Westmeath	7
Wexford	8
Wicklow	7
Total	170

Rural Recreation Scheme

1718. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications and the amount of funding sought under the rural recreation scheme; the number of projects refused funding under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37283/17]

1719. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of applications for funding under the outdoor recreation infrastructure scheme, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37284/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1718 and 1719 together.

The Rural Recreation Scheme was introduced as a formal programme in 2016 and was re-titled the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme in 2017. The scheme supports the development and promotion of new recreational facilities and the maintenance of existing recreational infrastructure throughout rural Ireland.

The 2017 scheme was launched last April, with applications invited under three Measures:

Measure 1: Small Scale Maintenance/Promotion and Marketing

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

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

376 applications for funding were received under these Measures, with a total value in excess of €27 million. The table below outlines the number of applications received and the funding requested on a county basis. Some applications were also received from State bodies under Measure 3, in accordance with the provisions of the scheme.

To date, 219 projects with a value of €11.4 million have been approved under the scheme under Measures 1 and 3, and these will be implemented over a 15 month period. Successful projects under Measure 2 have yet to be announced.

Details of the successful projects are available on my Department's website at:

<http://dracd.gov.ie/about/rural/rural-development/rural-recreation/approved-schemes-2017/>.

The number of projects and funding approved each year is contingent on the budgetary provision available.

County	Measure 1				Measure 2	
	No. Applied	Amount Re-requested	No. Approved	No. Unsuccessful	No. Applied	Amount Re-requested
Carlow	5	€40,500	4	1	2	€159,000
Cavan	2	€20,000	2	0	4	€263,927
Clare	9	€83,917	6	3	4	€249,166
Cork	15	€138,020	12	3	4	€362,000
Donegal	9	€76,200	8	1	6	€348,400
Dublin South	4	€40,000	3	1	2	€200,000
Fingal	7	€70,846	4	3	4	€234,000
Galway	6	€53,500	5	1	7	€351,850
Kerry	15	€134,215	13	2	4	€383,920
Kildare	0	€0	0	0	0	€0
Kilkenny	6	€44,610	5	1	4	€114,800
Laois	8	€51,860	8	0	3	€266,687
Leitrim	13	€119,500	10	3	3	€300,000
Limerick	15	€135,270	15	0	3	€254,614
Longford	13	€105,159	12	1	5	€217,000
Louth	1	€8,500	1	0	4	€281,791
Mayo	17	€159,076	15	2	9	€796,000
Meath	6	€52,000	6	0	4	€222,760
Monaghan	15	€136,730	10	5	6	€425,200
Offaly	5	€40,115	5	0	2	€200,000
Roscommon	15	€118,041	15	0	4	€228,728
Sligo	16	€137,990	15	1	5	€289,452
Tipperary	7	€47,600	5	2	4	€260,296
Waterford	9	€70,600	9	0	3	€123,400
Westmeath	15	€149,310	15	0	4	€204,509
Wexford	2	€16,450	1	1	3	€224,394
Wicklow	6	€48,066	3	3	5	€332,200
Inland Fisheries				0		

Questions - Written Answers

Coillte				0		
Udaras				0		
Heritage Council				0		
Total	241	€2,098,075	207	34	108	€7,294,094

County	Measure 3			
	No.Applied	Amount Requested	No.Approved	No.Unsuccessful
Carlow	1	€260,000		1
Cavan	1	€597,310	1	0
Clare	1	€1,000,000		1
Cork	1	€1,000,000	1	0
Donegal	1	€234,723		1
Dublin South	1	€750,000	1	0
Fingal	1	€200,000		1
Galway	1	€137,040		1
Kerry	1	€448,527		1
Kildare	0	0		
Kilkenny	1	€250,630		1
Laois				
Leitrim	1	€955,153	1	
Limerick	1	€1,000,000		1
Longford	1	€350,000	1	
Louth				
Mayo	1	€984,000	1	
Meath	1	€1,000,000		1
Monaghan	1	€370,525		1
Offaly	1	€1,152,100	1	
Roscommon				
Sligo	1	€840,285	1	
Tipperary	1	€599,360		1
Waterford	1	€199,000		1
Westmeath	1	€784,324	1	
Wexford	1	€342,800	1	
Wicklow	1	€627,200		1
Inland Fisheries	1	€199,621		1
Coillte	1	€2,000,000	1	
Udaras	1	€736,000		1
Heritage Council	1	€986,692	1	
Total	27	€18,005,290	12	15

Western Development Commission Funding

1720. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the level of State funding to the Western Development Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37285/17]

1751. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation and details of all State funding to the Western Development Commission over the past five years. [38421/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 1720 and 1751 together.

The Western Development Commission (WDC) was established on a statutory footing in 1999 under the Western Development Commission Act, 1998. The main aim of the Commission is to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region, covering counties Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare.

The Exchequer allocations for the Western Development Commission in each of the five years from 2013 to 2017 inclusive are detailed on Table 1 below. The figures reflect the published Revised Estimates Volume for the years in question.

I have recently appointed a new Board to the WDC to continue to work to maximise the potential of the Western region.

Table 1 – REV allocations 2013-2017, Western Development Commission

Year	Current €000	Capital €000	Total€000
2013	1,531	-	1,531
2014	1,521	-	1,521
2015	1,488	-	1,488
2016	1,488	1,000	2,488
2017	1,495	1,000	2,495

CLÁR Programme

1721. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of money paid by his Department for town and village renewal and under the CLÁR programme respectively, by county, towards the close of 2016 for work to be done in 2017; the amount of expenditure that has been incurred to date in each county of the money allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37286/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Table 1 provides details of the funding allocated to each Local Authority and the most up to date expenditure information available in respect of the 2016 Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the 2016 CLÁR Programme.

My Department is keeping expenditure on these programmes under constant review to ensure that all money spent is in accordance with the project proposals and in line with the Public Spending Code.

My officials are currently in the process of compiling an updated expenditure outturn to 31 August, in consultation with the Local Authorities.

Table 1 - Rural Development Schemes 2016: Allocations and Expenditure

Local Authority	Town and Village Renewal		CLÁR	
	Allocation	Expenditure to 1/6/2017	Allocation	Expenditure to 1/6/2017
Carlow	€380,000.00	€354,534.00	€80,000.00	€68,000.00
Cavan	€380,000.00	€16,000.00	€498,184.00	€73,355.80
Clare	€380,000.00	€121,381.00	€284,000.00	€39,000.00
Cork	€380,000.00	€0.00	€562,222.00	€137,510.00

Local Authority	Town and Village Renewal		CLÁR	
	Allocation	Expenditure to 1/6/2017	Allocation	Expenditure to 1/6/2017
Donegal	€380,000.00	€0.00	€878,632.00	€45,324.20
Dublin (Fingal)	€380,000.00	€274,368.53	€0.00	€0.00
Galway	€380,000.00	€229,285.78	€392,000.00	€163,059.87
Kerry	€380,000.00	€328,790.00	€744,964.00	€409,503.00
Kildare	€380,000.00	€119,730.00	€0.00	€0.00
Kilkenny	€380,000.00	€34,108.28	€223,000.00	€77,082.87
Laois	€380,000.00	€118,940.00	€148,900.00	€130,500.00
Leitrim	€380,000.00	€367,909.64	€274,800.00	€0.00
Limerick	€380,000.00	€242,742.00	€235,000.00	€206,500.00
Longford	€380,000.00	€380,000.00	€237,560.00	€35,040.00
Louth	€380,000.00	€342,675.00	€173,520.00	€74,295.00
Mayo	€380,000.00	€321,615.00	€976,869.00	€366,559.00
Meath	€380,000.00	€298,260.00	€127,600.00	€121,672.00
Monaghan	€380,000.00	€338,243.00	€356,440.00	€231,644.78
Offaly	€380,000.00	€0.00	€123,398.00	€104,522.50
Roscommon	€380,000.00	€181,906.50	€406,497.40	€394,528.85
Sligo	€380,000.00	€380,000.00	€598,400.00	€240,100.00
Tipperary	€380,000.00	€254,225.00	€371,000.00	€176,080.87
Waterford	€380,000.00	€338,000.00	€261,600.00	€232,172.15
Westmeath	€380,000.00	€146,263.41	€214,280.00	€14,436.70
Wexford	€380,000.00	€197,227.77	€0.00	€0.00
Wicklow	€380,000.00	€202,083.00	€70,000.00	€5,675.00
Total	€9,880,000.00	€5,588,287.91	€8,238,866.40	€3,346,562.59

Departmental Expenditure

1722. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to ensure the full spend of all funding provided to his Department for 2017 including carryover of capital from 2016 and prepayments to local authorities made in 2016 or 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37288/17]

1724. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to ensure the full spend of funds transferred to his Department in 2017 under transfer of functions orders including the completion of works for which funding was prepaid to local authorities in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37290/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1722 and 1724 together.

My officials are currently in the process of finalising the Vote structure and 2017 allocation for my new Department with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Vote will include funding transferring in accordance with the transfer of functions orders, and will include Capital funding for Rural Development programmes. Expenditure from my Department's new Vote will be made in line with the Public Spending Code. Regular spending reports will be compiled to track progress and take corrective action, where necessary.

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With regard to payments made to Local Authorities under the Rural Development Programmes in 2016, all funding was provided in accordance with sanctions received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and on the basis of Funding Agreements with the Local Authorities.

My Department is keeping expenditure on these programmes under constant review. As part of this process, my officials actively engage on an ongoing basis with the Local Authorities to establish the current position with regard to project completion and expenditure.

The Local Authorities will be required to account for all funding received and a programme of inspections will also be carried out to ensure that the funding is spent in accordance with the original project proposals.

CLÁR Programme

1723. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the further schemes he plans rolling out under the CLÁR scheme in 2017; if this will include a local improvement scheme element; if so, if there will be co-funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for such a scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37289/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I have allocated a total of €7 million to projects right across the country under four separate Measures of the CLÁR programme this year. I currently do not plan to roll out any further schemes under the CLÁR programme in 2017.

However, I am currently in the process of examining the possibility of introducing a Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) in 2017 to support the maintenance and improvement of non-public roads and laneways, many of which are in CLÁR areas. In this regard, my Department wrote to relevant Local Authorities recently to establish the level of demand for such a scheme and the capacity of the Local Authorities to complete works under a scheme by the end of this year.

Local Authorities were asked to provide information to my Department by 14 September to assist me in making an informed decision regarding the potential impact and feasibility of introducing an LIS. It is not possible to extend this deadline if decisions are to be made around the possibility of introducing a scheme this year and making funding available quickly from the 2017 funding envelope.

I will consider the position in full on receipt of the information requested from the Local Authorities.

Question No. 1724 answered with Question No. 1722.

Question No. 1725 answered with Question No. 1714.

Leader Programmes Funding

1726. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the reason Leader funding is not dispersed in a timely manner; the amount of funding sought by groups in County Kerry to date in 2017; the amount allocated to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37543/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Funding Agreements with Local Action Groups (LAGs) for the delivery of the 2014-2020 LEADER programme were signed in the second half of 2016. Since then, the LAGs have been working to establish their programmes locally and encourage applications.

The Funding Agreement for delivery of the new LEADER 2014-2020 Programme in the Kerry sub-regional area was signed on 8 July 2016, with approved funding of approximately €10.219 million over the lifetime of the programme.

In light of concerns raised by project promoters and LAGs concerning the pace of approval of projects under the LEADER programme, a forum was held on May 17 last with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER, including representatives from the Kerry LAG. The forum provided a platform to explore the administrative issues impacting on project approvals, and to identify potential solutions to the issues identified.

The forum was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined. My officials reviewed all of the contributions made at the forum and identified a significant number of administrative changes that could be made to simplify and improve the delivery of the LEADER Programme. Many of these improvements have already been implemented, with the remaining actions coming into effect over the coming months.

More than 170 eligible expressions of interest from potential applicants in County Kerry have been recorded on the LEADER ICT system. To date, 93 of these project applications with a value of €1,588,253 have been fully approved for LEADER funding by Kerry Local Community Development Committee.

I understand that the LAG is continuing to work through the expressions of interest with a view to assisting project promoters in developing and finalising further project applications.

On the basis of the progress now being made in Kerry, and the administrative changes which have been introduced, I anticipate a significant increase in LEADER project approvals in Kerry over the coming months.

Community Development Initiatives

1727. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the clubs and organisations approved in each county and local authority area for funding under the community facilities scheme 2017; and the amounts that were approved. [37756/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): 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. The closing date for receipt of applications was 30 June however the selection process is ongoing.

Each of the 31 Local Authorities will be provided with an equal allocation of €64,500 and arrangements for the transfer of these funds to the local authorities have been completed.

Further information on the Scheme can be found on the Department's website at the following link: <http://drcd.gov.ie/community/communities-facilities-scheme/>.

Community Banking

1728. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to recent publicity regarding an organisation's (details supplied) work here regarding the establishment of a public banking network; if the organisation invited officials from the Department for Finance and his Department to participate in a field trip to Germany to examine the public banking network there; the technical assistance the organisation offered the Government in respect of the establishment of a public banking network here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37768/17]

1736. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to recent publicity regarding an organisation's (details supplied) work here regarding the establishment of a public banking network; if the organisation invited officials from the Department of Finance and his Department to participate in a field trip to Germany to examine the public banking network there; the technical assistance the organisation offered the Government in respect of the establishment of a public banking network here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38100/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1728 and 1736 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to investigate a German model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

As a part of this investigation, my officials, along with officials from the Department of Finance, met with the organisation referred to by the Deputy on 2 March 2017. Representatives from the organisation gave a presentation outlining the German public banking model and offered their expertise and assistance if the Government wished to proceed with establishing a similar model in Ireland. An invitation has been extended to the Irish authorities to travel to Germany to obtain further information.

The engagement with the organisation in question was just one element of the process of investigating the model of local public banking. A public consultation process on the matter was launched in early March and ran for four weeks, to 29 March. My officials received a total of 16 replies from a range of stakeholders and all submissions were considered.

My officials, together with officials from the Department of Finance, are currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a local public banking model in Ireland. Their work is now near completion and a report will be submitted to me and to the Minister for Finance shortly for consideration.

Community Banking

1729. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the public banking investigation will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37769/17]

1733. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the public banking investigation will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37976/17]

1737. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the public banking investigation will be published; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [38101/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1729, 1733 and 1737 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, which could be delivered through the post office network. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

My officials have been working actively with the Department of Finance over the last number of months to progress these commitments. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies were received from a range of stakeholders and all submissions have been reviewed and considered. My officials, along with officials from the Department of Finance, also met with the Sparkassen Foundation for International Co-operation in relation to the German Sparkassen model in particular and obtained detailed information from that organisation.

The Departmental officials are currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a local public banking model in Ireland. This work is nearing completion and a report will be submitted to me and to the Minister for Finance shortly. I envisage that the report will be submitted to Government for consideration prior to any decision regarding publication.

Departmental Data

1730. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the location of the headquarters of his Department; the number of civil servants based there; the number of civil servants based in each other location that his department has an office; the town each one of these offices is located in; the reason that the headquarters of his department is not located in a rural area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37869/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Department of Rural and Community Development was established following the enactment of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act 2017 on the 19 July 2017.

The functions which transferred to my Department include the Rural Division from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaelteacht, the Community Division from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and Charities Regulatory Authority from the Department of Justice and Equality.

Negotiations are on-going with these Departments and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to determine the final staffing complement.

The Department is currently based in a number of locations around the country including Dublin. The Department will be headquartered in Dublin, with a significant staffing complement in Ballina, Co. Mayo. The three Departments from which the new Department is being formed have already significant operations in Dublin.

Discussions are on-going with the Office of Public Works around permanent accommodation arrangements for the Dublin-based staff.

Local Improvement Scheme Administration

1731. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the position regarding the local improvement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37908/17]

1739. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the timeframe for implementing the newly announced local improvement scheme; the timeframe for grant approvals; the date for works completion by the local authority; the national budget for the LIS programme for 2017; the ratio mechanism for dividing the budget by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38339/17]

1740. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will extend the 14 September 2017 deadline for submission of potential projects for funding under the new LIS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38344/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1731, 1739 and 1740 together.

I am currently in the process of examining the possibility of introducing a Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) in 2017 to support the maintenance and improvement of non-public roads and laneways, many of which are in rural areas. In this regard, my Department wrote to relevant Local Authorities recently to establish the level of demand for such a scheme and the capacity of the Local Authorities to complete works under a scheme by the end of this year.

Local Authorities were asked to provide information to my Department by 14 September to assist me in making an informed decision regarding the potential impact and feasibility of introducing an LIS, and subject to the necessary funding being available. It is not possible to extend this deadline if decisions are to be made around the possibility of introducing a scheme this year and making funding available quickly from the 2017 funding envelope.

I will consider the issue of the level of funding and disbursement arrangements in full on receipt of the information requested from the Local Authorities.

Local Improvement Scheme Administration

1732. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the reason a short timeframe was given to local authorities to assess the level of demand for the local improvement scheme (details supplied); if he has given consideration to extending the timeframe for same in view of the fact that demand will have risen significantly and therefore persons and local representatives will need sufficient time to process applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37965/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I am currently in the process of examining the possibility of introducing a Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) in 2017 to support the maintenance and improvement of non-public roads and laneways, many of which are in rural areas. In this regard, my Department wrote to relevant Local Authorities recently to establish the level of demand for such a scheme and the capacity of the Local Authorities to complete works under a scheme by the end of this year.

Local Authorities were asked to provide information to my Department by 14 September to assist me in making an informed decision regarding the potential impact and feasibility of introducing an LIS, and subject to the necessary funding being available. It is not possible to

extend this deadline if decisions are to be made around the possibility of introducing a scheme this year and making funding available quickly from the 2017 funding envelope.

I will consider the issue of the level of funding and disbursement arrangements in full on receipt of the information requested from the Local Authorities.

Question No. 1733 answered with Question No. 1729.

Brexit Staff

1734. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37998/17]

1735. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of staff deployed full time in his department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38014/17]

1755. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38700/17]

1756. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38716/17]

1757. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38732/17]

1758. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the scenario planning that has been conducted by his department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38748/17]

1759. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38764/17]

1760. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38780/17]

1761. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38812/17]

1762. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of vacancies in his department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38828/17]

1763. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38844/17]

1764. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38860/17]

1765. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by his department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38892/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1734, 1735, and 1755 to 1765, inclusive, together.

My colleague the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., has the primary responsibility for leading on Brexit negotiations. My Department is contributing on an ongoing basis to discussions and providing policy advice relevant to its remit as and when required.

The comprehensive document “Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union: The Government’s Approach”, published on 2 May, outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a co-ordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and new Cabinet Committees relating respectively to the Economy, and EU Affairs, including Brexit and the Economic Response to Brexit, have been established to provide an opportunity for cross-departmental input into the issues.

My Department of Rural and Community Development has been established to deliver on the Government’s commitment to bring a greater degree of coordination and cohesion to all of the work of Government in so far as it impacts on rural Ireland. The impact of Brexit on regional and rural businesses and on communities is relevant across a number of policy areas of my Department. In this context, considerations around the impact of Brexit are shared across different policy areas, rather than being assigned to a single Unit.

In addition, my role in the Cabinet Committee on the Economy gives me a specific forum to raise issues for Rural Ireland relating to the Economy, Jobs, the Labour Market, Competitiveness, Productivity, Trade, the Action Plan on Rural Development and the Digital Economy, including managing and mitigating the risks associated with Brexit.

Question No. 1736 answered with Question No. 1728.

Question No. 1737 answered with Question No. 1729.

Action Plan for Rural Development Expenditure

1738. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if she will provide a breakdown of all moneys expended by his Department in promoting and launching the action plan for rural development; the costs associated with advertising, design work, photography, event staging and venue hire; the cost of creating the website and mainte-

nance costs for the year, in tabular form; the budget allocated in his Department's budget for promotional activities in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38302/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Action Plan for Rural Development was launched in Ballymahon, Co. Longford, in January 2017. The costs associated with the launch and promotion of the Action Plan as requested by the Deputy over the year to date is set out in the table below.

My officials are currently in the process of finalising the Vote for my new Department with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and budget lines for specific activities will be agreed in that context. At this stage, however, I do not envisage that significant additional costs associated with the promotion of the Action Plan for Rural Development will be incurred over the remainder of the year.

Item	Cost
Advertising	Nil
Design Work	€21,017.14
Photography	€150.00
Video Production	€10,608.75
Event Staging & Venue Hire	€3,611.28
Creating Website & Ongoing Update/ Maintenance	€16,410.45

Questions Nos. 1739 and 1740 answered with Question No. 1731.

Leader Programmes Data

1741. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of Leader applications received via Leader companies by month in 2016 and for the first six months of 2017, by company; the number of these applications that were ineligible; the combined monthly value of applications submitted for each company; the number of these applications that have been sanctioned for payment which have been paid; the number of these applications that have been sanctioned for payment which have not been paid; the time of payment delay in each case of sanctioned application that has not been paid; the reasons for the delay in drawing down Leader funding in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38345/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER plays a valuable role in supporting rural development and is an important part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development. I am committed to implementing the LEADER programme as effectively as possible. However, I am also conscious that concerns were raised earlier this year by project promoters and Local Action Groups regarding the implementation of the programme.

In light those concerns, a forum was held on 17 May last with participants from all of the Local Action Groups and the Local Development Companies delivering LEADER to explore how improvements could be made. The forum was very productive and participants identified a number of areas where they felt procedures could be streamlined. Arising from the forum, my Department has introduced a series of measures to improve administrative procedures in the delivery of the LEADER Programme.

The amount of funding approved by the Local Action Groups for projects has increased significantly in the last two months, with €6.2 million having been approved since July compared to €0.9 million in the first six months of the year. This funding will be drawn down as projects start to incur expenditure and submit payment claims. There has been no undue delay in the processing of approved project payment claims submitted to date to my Department.

It has not been possible, in the time available, to compile the detailed information requested by the Deputy in relation to individual Local Action Groups. However, the total number of Expressions of Interest received under the LEADER programme to date is in excess of 5,500. I understand that approximately 10% of these have been deemed ineligible by the Local Action Groups.

I have asked my officials to collate the information at the level requested by the Deputy and I will ensure that this information is provided in accordance with Dáil Standing Orders.

Question No. 1742 answered with Question No. 1706.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

1743. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of an application under the town and village renewal scheme by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38371/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13 April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. The scheme will support up to 300 towns and villages over the next 12 months.

The closing date for applications was 30 June 2017 and there was a high level of interest in the programme. I can confirm that an application for funding in respect of the project referred to by the Deputy was submitted for consideration.

The assessment of applications under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme is nearing completion and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects shortly.

Question No. 1744 answered with Question No. 1706.

Scheme to Support National Organisations

1745. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to men's sheds over each of the past ten years. [38402/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I am advised that prior to 2014, no applications were received from the Irish Men's Sheds Association Ltd. for funding under the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary sector. The Irish Men's Sheds Association Ltd successfully applied for funding under the 2014-2016 iteration of the Scheme. The scheme ran from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2016 and the organisation was allocated €175,950 over this 24 month period.

The current scheme commenced on 1 July 2016 to run for a three year period. I am advised that the Men's Sheds Association did not apply for funding under the current scheme.

My Department's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) provides support to local community groups under Goal 1 of SICAP. The focus of Goal 1 is to support and resource disadvantaged communities and marginalised target groups to engage with relevant local and national stakeholders in identifying and addressing social exclusion and equality issues. The Goal Objectives are:

- To support and promote the community engagement of disadvantaged target groups across the life-cycle;
- To support the development of local community groups which promote equality and social inclusion in a local, regional or national context;
- To support disadvantaged communities and individuals to enhance their participation in local, regional and national decision-making structures;
- To develop and facilitate strategic collaborative frameworks and networks as part of a dialogue for developing solutions to social exclusion.

SICAP commenced on 1 April 2015 and continues until 31 December 2017.

Activities recorded to date show:

- 42 Programme Implementers recorded activity to support the men's sheds;
- 182 Men's Sheds supported;
- 8 Women's Sheds supported;
- 1,729 support interventions were provided to these groups since the start of SICAP. Interventions included: support to leverage funding, Capacity building and organisational development, Collective Action, Pre development and group formation, Participation in local, regional or national decision-making structures and Social Enterprise;
- 5 groups received a small grant (total amount: €4,387).

In addition to the supports above and outside of SICAP a once off grant of €15,000 was provided in 2016 to support the build costs of a Men's Shed.

Departmental Funding

1746. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the allocation to the women's networks over each of the past ten years. [38403/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Payments issued to the Women's networks under my Department's former Community Development Programme (CDP) and Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) for the period 2007 to 2010 are outlined in Appendix 1 and payments for the period 2011 to 2017 under the LCDP are outlined in Appendix 2.

During 2010, the then Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs led out on a programme of structural reform, involving, inter alia, the integration of community development projects with local development companies throughout the country. As part of that process a number of alternative integration models were proposed. The National Collective of Community Womens Networks (NCCWN) submitted a proposal to the Department which would see it (the NCCWN) as the integrating body for the 17 Women's CDPs (see Appendix 3).

The proposal was accepted by the Department. From 2011, the then Department's contract for the delivery of the LCDP, was with the NCCWN and it no longer had any contractual or other connection to the CDPs in question.

Since 2015, the NCCWN and the National Traveller Womens Forum have been funded and administered by the Department of Justice and Equality. My Department also provides funding for a number of Women's organisations through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) which aims to provide multi-annual funding to national organisations towards core costs associated with the provision of services. The Scheme commenced in 2008, and total allocations are provided on a multiannual basis for the period of each iteration of the scheme as outlined in Appendix 4.

My Department also provides annual funding to members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar to support costs, not funded from any other sources, directly related to the organisations' contribution to policy-making. The National Women's Council of Ireland is a member of the Pillar, and the table below outlines funding provided since 2008.

Year	Funding provided
2008	55,000
2009	52,800
2010	48,576
2011	20,000
2012	20,000
2013	18,840
2014	18,840
2015	18,840
2016	18,840
2017	18,840

Appendix 1

Project	2007 CDP Core Funding and Grants	2008 CDP Core Funding and Grants	2009 CDP Core Funding and Grants	2010 Core Funding, Grants and windup costs	2011 Once off Grants
Claremorris Women's Group	€27,527.00	€28,310.00	€25,016.00	€25,016.01	€0.00
Women Community Project Mullingar	€60,875.00	€119,832.00	€106,570.40	€119,703.22	€0.00
Bawnogue Women's	€60,150.00	€82,300.00	€69,628.00	€69,627.69	€0.00
Northwest Inner City Women's Network	€55,125.00	€98,852.00	€79,612.31	Discontinued under LCDP	Discontinued under LCDP
Tralee Women's CFG	€55,250.00	€109,164.00	€102,374.00	€102,373.52	€0.00
North Wall Women's Centre	€70,500.00	€89,625.00	€71,000.00	€71,000.00	€0.00
Limerick Women's Network	€86,440.50	€100,761.15	€86,931.00	€93,000.00	€0.00

Questions - Written Answers

Project	2007 CDP Core Funding and Grants	2008 CDP Core Funding and Grants	2009 CDP Core Funding and Grants	2010 Core Funding, Grants and windup costs	2011 Once off Grants
Roscommon Women's Network	€89,628.00	€94,994.00	€90,746.00	€90,745.73	€1,210.00
Independent Mothers Project	€91,989.00	€82,630.48	€84,649.00	€51,194.61	€0.00
Southwest Kerry Women's Network	€98,729.00	€118,000.00	€104,265.00	€104,264.81	€0.00
Rowlagh Womens Group	€110,327.00	€129,510.00	€113,366.00	€113,365.89	€1,621.86
Clare Women's Network	€104,000.00	€127,480.00	€91,091.00	€95,000.01	€2,278.50
Women Together, Tallaght	€109,886.00	€106,000.00	€83,518.54	€84,363.85	€0.00
Dochas for Women CFG	€107,000.00	€114,000.00	€100,730.00	€100,730.40	€1,938.18
Southside Women's Network	€131,110.00	€127,000.00	€112,217.00	€111,092.21	€2,659.00
National Traveller Women's Forum	€107,474.00	€110,135.00	€108,321.00	€108,804.91	€0.00
North Leitrim Women's Group	€113,109.00	€117,000.00	€105,681.80	€102,363.20	€600.00
Women of the North West	€111,739.00	€129,995.00	€114,864.00	€47,209.00	€2,420.00
Clondalkin Womens' Network	€132,244.00	€121,000.00	€105,366.00	€113,851.86	€1,971.08
Donegal Women's Network	€127,589.41	€126,401.72	€111,334.00	€119,818.60	€1,550.29
Access 2000, Wexford	€143,302.00	€136,400.00	€120,523.00	€120,523.05	€948.43
Waterford Womens Centre	€216,688.00	€140,700.00	€124,323.00	€124,322.53	€1,520.00
Ronanstown Womens CDP	€143,710.00	€114,898.70	€118,946.21	€123,186.00	€463.00
Womens Aid	€200,000.00	€204,894.00	€167,620.09	€181,041.18	€0.00
NCCWN				€10,250.00	

Appendix 2

Networks	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
NCCWN	€1,721,108	€1,498,194	€1,362,601	**€1,344,620	*€314,305.00	*Nil	*Nil
Women's Aid (Transferred to SSNO from July 2014)	€167,895	€106,238	€131,114	**€72,334.50	Nil	Nil	Nil

National Travellers Women's Forum (NTWF Transferred to SSNO from July 2014)	€105,137	€91,469	€83,237	**€60,259	Nil	Nil	Nil
North Wall Women's Centre	68,927	59,967	55,769	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Tralee Women's Resource Centre	99,451	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Waterford Womens Centre	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	€15,000	Nil	Nil

*2015 Full year allocation was €1.3 Million, funded under the LCDP from 1 January to 31 March 2015 with the remainder paid by the Department of Justice and Equality.

**Funding vired to Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) as set out below

- NCCWN €32,024
- Womens Aid €31,583
- NTWF €33,637

Appendix 3

List of Women's projects funded under the LCDP by NCCWN:

1. Access 2000 Wexford
2. Blayney Blades
3. Clare Women's Network
4. Claremorris Women's Group
5. Clondalkin Women's Network
6. Dochas for Women
7. Donegal Women's Network
8. Limerick Women's Network
9. Women's Community Projects, Mullingar
10. North Leitrim Women's Resource Centre
11. Ronanstown Women's CDP
12. Roscommon Women's Network

13. Rowlagh Women's Group
14. Southside Women's Action Network
15. Southwest Kerry Women's Association
16. Waterford Women's Centre
17. Women Together Tallaght Network

Appendix 4

Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO)	National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks (NC-CWN)	National Traveller Women's Forum	National Women's Council of Ireland	Women's Aid
2008-2011	167,760	167,760	221,570	0
2011-2014	114,259	114,259	0	0
2014-2016	160,122	168,185	151,382	157,914
2016-2019	0	0	270,000	239,584

Question No. 1747 answered with Question No. 1712.

Question No. 1748 answered with Question No. 1713.

Question No. 1749 answered with Question No. 1716.

Question No. 1750 answered with Question No. 1701.

Question No. 1751 answered with Question No. 1720.

Community Banking

1752. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made with regard to the planned new model of community banking through post offices based on models (details supplied) as outlined in the programme for Government. [38501/17]

1753. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the progress made with regard to the post office network motion dated 16 November 2016 with regard to a new community banking service operated by An Post based on models (details supplied). [38502/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1752 and 1753 together.

The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, based on overseas models, which could potentially be delivered, inter alia, through the post office network.

My officials have been working actively with the Department of Finance over the last number of months to progress these commitments. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies were received from a range of stakeholders and all submissions have been reviewed and considered.

My officials, along with Department of Finance officials, also met with the Sparkassen Foundation for International Co-operation in relation to the German Sparkassen model in particular, and obtained detailed information from that organisation.

The Departmental officials are currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a local public banking model in Ireland. Their work is now nearing completion and a report will be submitted to me and to the Minister for Finance shortly for consideration.

Leader Programmes Expenditure

1754. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding provided in his Department's Estimates for the Leader programme for 2017; the expenditure to date; the projected expenditure by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38679/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): A total of €40 million has been provided in the Estimates process this year for the delivery of LEADER programme.

LEADER is a multi-annual programme which runs to 2020. Following the signing in July 2016 of Funding Agreements with the Local Action Groups which deliver the programme, LEADER has continued to gain momentum this year.

Total expenditure on LEADER in 2017 to date amounts to €8.44 million. This includes administration and animation costs and approximately €50,000 related to commitments under the 2007-2013 programme.

The amount of funding approved by the Local Action Groups for projects has increased significantly in the last two months, with €6.2 million having been approved since July compared to €0.9 million in the first six months of the year. This funding will be drawn down as projects start to incur expenditure and submit payment claims.

Expenditure under the LEADER Programme is kept under constant review by my Department. In this regard, my officials have recently written to all Local Action Groups to ascertain their projected expenditure for the remainder of the year. My Department has also introduced a series of measures to improve administrative procedures in the delivery of LEADER.

I am confident that the significant increase in the funding approved by the Local Action Groups, along with the administrative improvements introduced by my Department, will have a positive impact on the number of projects maturing for payment over the coming months.

Questions Nos. 1755 to 1765, inclusive, answered with Question No. 1734.

Departmental Expenditure

1766. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development

the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38908/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): As the Deputy will appreciate my Department was formally established with the passing of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 2017 before the summer recess. The Department's main focus since then has been to co-ordinate its various functions and budget lines that are transferring to the new Department from other Departments. My Department is currently undertaking a review of expenditure to date in the context of the estimates 2018 cycle.

Civil Registration Legislation

1767. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to enable members of an organisation (details supplied) to act as solemnisers for marriage ceremonies in view of the fact that such persons have undergone the necessary training and achieved the competency to act as independent celebrants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36891/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The legal basis for the appointment of marriage solemnisers in Ireland may be found in Part 6 of the Civil Registration Act 2004, as amended.

Section 54 of the Act provides for the categories of bodies that may apply for registration of persons on the Register of Solemnisers maintained by an t-Árd Chláraitheoir (the Registrar General).

These are:

I have made enquiries of the Registrar General, in relation to this, and have been informed that no application has been received from the organisation referred to by the deputy. If they wish to apply, under one of the categories provided for, they should contact the General Register Office at the following address:

General Register Office,
Government Offices,
Convent Road,
Roscommon,
Co. Roscommon,
F42 VX53.

Death Certificates

1768. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) was unable to obtain a death certificate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36990/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

registration of deaths is provided for in Part 5 of the Civil Registration Act 2004. Specifically, section 37 of the Act provides that when a death occurs in the State it is the duty of a relative of the deceased, who has knowledge of the required particulars in relation to the death, to provide these particulars, within three months of the death, to any registrar. The required particulars are set out in Part 5 of the First Schedule to the Act.

If no such relative can be found, or is incapable through ill health of complying with this obligation, the death may be registered by a qualified informant within the three month period. The definition of a qualified informant is set out in section 37(5) of the Act.

If, in the case referred to by the deputy, there exists a relative of the deceased with knowledge of the required particulars, then that relative is obliged, under the legislation, to register the death. If no such relative can be found, the partner of the deceased may register the death as a qualified informant.

New provisions governing the registration of deaths, which would allow, for example, a cohabitant to register the death of their partner, will be commenced later this year.

Central Bank of Ireland Data

1769. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the Central Bank's new metric, the non-employment index, and the finding that 888,708 persons of working age between 15 to 64 fall into this non-employed category. [38305/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The employment rate for people aged 15-64 is just over 65%. This means that, according to the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) for Q1 2017 published by the Central Statistics Office in May, there are about 1.05 million people in this age group who are not working. As the employment rate has improved from a low of 59% in early 2011, the number of non-working people in this age group has fallen by about 230,000 from its then level of 1.27 million.

The non-working group published in the QNHS includes, as well as the unemployed, other categories such as students, full-time carers, people who are unable to work due to disability, and people who may have retired early.

I understand that these existing QNHS categories, combined with past QNHS data on transitions to employment from each of the various categories, have now been used by the Central Bank to produce a "non-employment index" – a weighted average of the estimated trend in potential availability for work among people in each category. The index for the most recent quarter is given as 7.9% of the relevant population – suggesting that the availability of potential workers aged 15 to 65 available to enter employment in the near term is of the order of 240,000 – i.e. somewhat greater than the figure of 150,000 unemployed in that quarter, but less than a quarter of the 1.05 million people in the same age group who are not working.

It has always been clear that jobs, when created, are taken up not just by the unemployed but also by other groups outside the labour force – particularly new entrants from education and people returning to the workforce after a period when they were engaged, for example, in full-time caring. The work by the Central Bank is a useful attempt to quantify the scale of this labour availability based on historic data on take-up of employment by these groups.

As unemployment falls, government policies under the Pathways to Work strategy are increasingly focused on supporting active labour market participation by people currently outside

the workforce – particularly carers and those with disabilities.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1770. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38558/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 21 June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 31 July 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1771. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the entitlements of persons to a State pension (contributory) whose insurance contributions records were interrupted due to periods in receipt of farm assist while farm incomes were low; if the periods that persons were on farm assist can be credited for insurance contribution purposes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36775/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The farm assist scheme was introduced in 1999 to provide income support for low income farmers. It replaced the former smallholders' unemployment assistance payment. In line with the then existing arrangements for unemployment assistance (including smallholders) and pre-retirement allowance, the income of farm assist recipients was exempt from class S PRSI for self-employed workers.

Recipients of farm assist who had previously paid Class S social insurance had the option of paying voluntary contributions to maintain their social insurance record, provided they satisfied the qualifying conditions. Since 1 January 2007, the exemption from class S PRSI has been removed and those receiving jobseeker's allowance and farm assist are subject to Class S PRSI as self-employed contributors on their self-employed income, provided their annual income is €5,000 or more.

There are no plans to amend legislation regarding the State pension (contributory), to award a maximum rate payment to pensioners who had such a period during 1999-2006 when they were exempt from PRSI.

However, a person aged over 66 with limited PRSI contributions over the course of their life may claim a State pension (non-contributory) if they have an income need, and this entitlement is not based on payment of social insurance contributions. The maximum weekly rate is €227,

i.e. over 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate. While it is means-tested, there are very significant disregards which are to the benefit of claimants, and a significant majority of such pensioners are paid at the full rate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Expenditure

1772. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of restoring child benefit to 2008 levels; and the estimated cost of restoring the higher rates of child benefit for second and subsequent children to 2008 levels. [36832/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to around 627,000 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

Between 2000 and 2009, there were significant increases in Child Benefit payments and during that period overall expenditure on Child Benefit grew from €638 million to approximately €2.5 billion per year. This reflected a policy focus on targeting additional resources towards the provision of universal child income supports. Child Benefit is paid on such a basis i.e. without regard to household income.

Between 2009 and 2013 a number of reductions were made to Child Benefit as cost saving measures designed to reduce overall public expenditure with a view to restoring stability to the public finances.

Budget 2009 provided for the reduction of the maximum age for which Child Benefit is paid. A half rate payment was paid in respect of those aged 18 years in 2009 and from 2010 Child Benefit was no longer paid in respect of those aged 18. Child Benefit rates were reduced in both Budgets 2010 and 2011. Budget 2011 reduced the lower and higher rates of Child Benefit to €140 and €177 per month respectively and also introduced a third Child Benefit rate of €167 per month.

Budget 2012 maintained Child Benefit rate for the first and second child at €140 per month while reducing the monthly rate for the third child to €148 and for the fourth and each subsequent child to €160. It also proposed to standardise Child Benefit at a rate of €140 per month for all children from 2013. Budget 2012 also provided for the discontinuation of the grant of €635 paid at birth on all multiple births and when multiple birth children are 4 years of age and 12 years of age.

Budget 2013 reduced Child Benefit rates to €130 per month for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd child while Child Benefit rates for the 4th and subsequent children were set at €140 per month as announced in Budget 2012. From January 2014, the monthly rate in respect of the 4th and subsequent children was set at €130. No new changes to Child Benefit were introduced in Budget 2014.

In 2015 the monthly Child Benefit rate increased by €5, from €130 to €135 and in Budget 2016 there was a further €5 increase in the rate, from €135 to €140 per month.

Given the numerous changes made to Child Benefit since 2008 it is difficult to cost with accuracy reversing all the changes to the scheme since 2008. However, using all the available data it is estimated that the cost of restoring child benefit to 2008 levels would be in the region of €627 million. This figure includes an estimated cost of €522 million to restore the higher rates of child benefit for second and subsequent children.

Labour Activation Measures

1773. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider introducing new labour activation supports for unemployed persons that do not qualify for a basic social welfare payment due to their household means, ongoing medical treatment or that were previously self-employed and are unable to access private training opportunities; and her plans to broaden the access criteria for schemes such as community employment or the back to education allowance. [36876/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This policy objective prioritises resources to those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments – Jobseeker’s Benefit or Jobseeker’s Allowance – that are conditional on the recipient being actively seeking and available for employment, as well as, in the case of Jobseeker’s Allowance, meeting a means test. The employment services and schemes provided by the Department are focused in the first instance on this cohort of unemployed people.

Many other services are also available to people who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment. For example, employment services, such as advice on job-search activities and the use of online job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department’s Intreo offices regardless of their social welfare status.

Unemployed persons not in receipt of qualifying payments may also be eligible to avail of upskilling opportunities, for example through ETB training for unemployed people, but are not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course. An unemployed person who does not qualify for a social welfare payment due to the assessment of their means may be eligible to sign for social insurance contribution credits. Persons signing on for credits for 12 months or longer over the previous 18 months are entitled to participate on Momentum courses through Solas, provided that they have been actively seeking work, however they will not receive any payment. Persons signing for credits for six months or more are entitled to participate on ETB-run VTOS courses subject to availability. In the case of VTOS courses, participants do not receive a training allowance but may receive travel and lunch allowances. Springboard and Skillnets courses for unemployed people, funded through the Department of Education and Skills, are also open to people regardless of their social welfare status.

In addition, the Qualified Adult Dependent of a person in receipt of one of the qualifying payments for BTEA purposes may be approved for BTEA provided they establish an entitlement to a BTEA qualifying payment in their own right and subject to satisfying all other BTEA conditions. Those in receipt of a number of other qualifying payments (including One-Parent Family Payment and Disability Allowance) may be approved for BTEA subject to satisfying all BTEA conditions.

Action 26.5 of the current Pathways to Work Strategy commits to examining the supports required to facilitate greater participation by people with disabilities, single parents, qualified adults and individuals in need of greater support in education and training. Having reviewed

this action, the Department is satisfied at present that existing supports are sufficient but will continue to review the situation in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS.

The Government is committed to supporting as many people as possible to participate more fully in employment and to become more self-sufficient by providing supports that address barriers they may encounter in finding and sustaining employment.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1774. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason for delays in processing applications for domiciliary care allowance; and the reason for the delay in the case of a person (details supplied). [36889/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from this lady on the 29th March 2017. This lady was notified on 30 August 2017 that her domiciliary care allowance claim has been awarded from 1 October 2016. The first payment of the allowance, along with arrears due will issue on 19 September 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

1775. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person that is 18 years of age and has finished second level education cannot receive social protection payments until September in view of the fact that their parents are on the live register and have no other means to support them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36892/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The jobseeker's allowance scheme provides income support for people who have lost work and are unable to find alternative full-time employment. The 2017 Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure this year on the jobseeker's allowance scheme of €2.16 billion.

Social welfare legislation provides that a person is not entitled to jobseeker's allowance while attending a course of study. This disqualification also extends to the holiday periods, including the summer holidays. It also provides that a person shall be regarded as attending a course of study:-

- For 3 months immediately following the completion or the leaving by that person of second level education or the completion by him or her of the leaving certificate examination of the Department of Education and Skills, whichever is the later;
- For the duration of an academic year, or
- For the period immediately following the completion of one academic year, other than the final academic year of a course of study, up to the beginning of the following year.

The disqualification for three months is a targeted measure aimed at protecting young people from welfare dependency. If school leavers or college students were eligible for a jobseeker's payment for the summer months it could prove a significant disincentive for them to continue

their education.

Where the young person's parent is in receipt of a social welfare payment, an increase for a qualified child can continue to be paid in respect of that young person for the three months referred to above, subject to the scheme conditionality being satisfied.

There are currently no plans to change the current arrangements in this regard and any changes to these provisions could only be considered in the context of the Budget.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

1776. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider an exemption for wards of court funds from the calculation of disability allowance for persons in budget 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36903/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides that all income and property (excluding the family home) of the claimant and his or her spouse/partner is assessable for means assessment purposes of social assistance schemes.

The purpose of contingency based income support payments such as Disability Allowance is to provide an income to those who have no other source of income (or only a very limited level of income). The assessment of means is a way of checking if a person has access to an income or if their income is so low as to warrant an income support payment. In this regard, a person who is a ward of court is treated in the same manner as any other social welfare claimant.

All means tested schemes assess capital assets (other than the family home) with an initial amount of capital that is disregarded for means purposes. For most social assistance schemes, such as Jobseeker's Allowance, Farm Assist, One-Parent Family Payment and the State Pension Non-Contributory, the first €20,000 of capital is disregarded. In the case of Disability Allowance, the initial disregard is significantly higher at €50,000. This means, for example, that a Disability Allowance claimant with €50,000 in savings (and no other means) can be assessed as having nil means and, as a result, receive the maximum rate of Disability Allowance.

It should be noted that a claimant of Disability Allowance, or indeed other social welfare payments, can ask for a review of their welfare entitlement at any stage. Should the value of a claimant's funds have decreased, this may generate an entitlement or an increase to a social welfare payment.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1777. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36908/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 6 June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 8 August 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary

decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals

1778. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the grounds upon which an appeal for jobseeker's allowance was refused following oral hearing in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36934/17]

1779. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the grounds upon which an appeal for jobseeker's allowance was refused following an oral hearing in the case of a person (details supplied) who submitted extra documentation as required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [36943/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1778 and 1779 together.

I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, including extra documentation as required and the evidence adduced at oral hearing, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned as he does not fulfil the statutory requirement of the habitual residence condition for receipt of a social assistance payment.

The person concerned was advised of the Appeals Officer's decision by notification dated 9 May 2017 which outlined in detail the reasons for his decision. The basis and reasons for the Appeals Officer's decision was also notified to the Deputy on 28 July 2017.

In summary, the Appeals Officer noted that the person concerned satisfied a means test and as an EU citizen has a right to reside in Ireland as a jobseeker in accordance with Article 6(2) of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 (S.I. 548 of 2015). However, Article 17(2) (a) of S.I. 548 of 2015 also prescribes that a person whose right to reside derives solely from Article 6(2) shall not be entitled to receive assistance under the Social Welfare Acts.

The Appeals Officer also concluded that the person concerned has not established a centre of interest in Ireland which presents a realistic prospect of supporting an intention of ongoing residence here without reliance on social welfare payments and therefore the person concerned does not satisfy the statutory habitual residence condition.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Data

1780. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of political staff employed in her Department, including parliamentary as-

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sistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within her Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form [36959/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following tables provide a breakdown of political staff employed in this Department for the years requested:

An Tánaiste Joan Burton TD		
Year: 2015		
	Position held	Annual salary
	Chief of Staff to the Tánaiste	€144,550
	Economic Advisor to the Tánaiste	€114,424
	Special Advisor to the Tánaiste	€79,401
	Special Advisor to the Tánaiste	€78,670
	Personal Assistant to the Tánaiste	€49,794
	Personal Secretary to the Tánaiste	€38,945
	Communications Executive	€47,458
	Correspondence Co-ordinator	€38,945
	Personal Secretary to the Minister of State	€49,405
	Personal Assistant to the Minister of State	€52,411
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964

An Tánaiste Joan Burton TD		
2016 (January 2016 to May 2016)		
	Position held	Annual salary
	Chief of Staff to the Tánaiste	€144,550
	Economic Advisor to the Tánaiste	€114,424
	Special Advisor to the Tánaiste	€79,401
	Special Advisor to the Tánaiste	€78,670
	Personal Assistant to the Tánaiste	€49,794

	Personal Secretary to the Tánaiste	€38,945
	Communications Executive	€47,458
	Correspondence Co-ordinator	€38,945
	Personal Secretary to the Minister of State	€49,405
	Personal Assistant to the Minister of State	€52,411
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964

Minister Leo Varadkar TD

From May 2016 to Dec 2016

	Position held	Annual salary
	Special Advisor to the Minister	€99,370
	Special Advisor to the Minister	€87,258
	Policy and Parliamentary Adviser	Employed by Houses of the Oireachtas
	Personal Secretary	Employed by Houses of the Oireachtas
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964

Minister Leo Varadkar TD

January 2017 to June 2017

	Position held	Annual salary
	Special Advisor to the Minister	€99,370
	Special Advisor to the Minister	€87,258
	Policy and Parliamentary Adviser	Employed by Houses of the Oireachtas
	Personal Secretary	Employed by Houses of the Oireachtas
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964

Minister Regina Doherty TD

		June 2017 to date
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	Position held	Annual salary
	Special Advisor to the Minister	€81,767
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964
	Civilian Driver to the Minister of State	€32,964
	Personal assistant	Employed by Houses of the Oireachtas
	Personal Secretary	Employed by Houses of the Oireachtas

Living Alone Allowance

1781. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated yearly cost of increasing the living alone allowance from €9 to €15 per week; her views on the fact that persons living alone have higher costs than couples; her plans to increase the living alone allowance in budget 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37039/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The living alone increase is an additional payment of €9 per week made to people aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments, including State pensions, and who are living alone. It is also available to people who are less than 66 years of age, living alone and in receipt of disability allowance, invalidity pension, incapacity supplement or blind pension. The objective of the payment is to compensate for the additional individual costs of living alone when compared to a couple or family.

The cost of raising the living alone increase from €9 to €15 per week is estimated to be €62.8 million in 2018. It should be noted that this costing is subject to change in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

The appropriate rates of welfare payments in 2018, including the weekly rate of the living alone increase, will be considered in the context of the Government's discussions on the next Budget.

According to the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ), as set out in *Minimum Essential Standard of Living 2017*, the minimum income standard for a pensioner living alone and in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment is €216.38 per week. Currently, a state pension non-contributory recipient receives the equivalent of a weekly income support of c. €255.30 per week, which is in excess of this standard.

Similarly, the minimum income standard, according to the VPSJ, for a single working age adult living alone is €214.69 per week. Currently, a recipient of disability allowance receives the equivalent weekly income of c. €221.30 per week, which again is in excess of this standard.

Illness Benefit Reform

1782. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there will be changes to sick pay in the next budget; if she will examine the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37151/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. One of the PRSI conditions is that a person must have a minimum of 39 reckonable contributions paid or credited in the governing contribution year. Claims made in 2017 are governed by the 2015 tax year, and only PRSI Classes A, E, H, and P are reckonable for Illness Benefit purposes.

The person concerned made a claim to Illness Benefit and this claim was received in my Department on 20 July 2017. This claim was disallowed as the person concerned does not satisfy the above contribution criteria. According to my Department's records the person concerned has no reckonable contributions or credits for the 2015 year.

The person concerned has been notified of this decision.

If the person concerned is unable to meet their needs or the needs of their household, they may be entitled to Supplementary Welfare Allowance and should contact their local Intreo centre.

The PRSI contribution conditions governing entitlement to Illness Benefit are statutory and cannot be either waived or modified in any particular case. Any amendments to the qualifying conditions for the scheme would have to be considered in the light of available resources.

Final decisions have not been taken in respect of any Budget matters.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1783. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37334/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from the person concerned for disability allowance (DA) was received by my department on 12 April 2017.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. The SWI has contacted the person concerned previously to arrange an interview. However, the person concerned was unable to attend. The SWI will contact this lady again to rearrange an interview. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1784. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37335/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social

Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1785. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37336/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1786. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37337/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 4 November 2016. The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purposes of deciding the claim. The person concerned failed to provide the SWI with information that was required to determine if her means were below the statutory limit.

As the requested information was not supplied it was decided that the person concerned was not entitled to CA.

The application was also disallowed on the grounds that she was not providing full-time care and attention as required.

The person concerned was notified on 25 May 2017 of these decisions, the reason for them

and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned has appealed this decision and has also requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support of the review. However some requested financial documentation is still outstanding. Once this information is received the review will be completed without delay and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

1787. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount allocated to the community services programme support fund in 2016 and 2017; the number of applications made to the support fund in 2016 and 2017; and the amount paid out in 2016, and to date in 2017. [37349/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the community services programme (CSP) provides financial support to community companies that provide revenue generating services of a socially inclusive nature. The contribution from the CSP is towards the wage costs of the companies. My Department does not set the wage rate but requires the payment of appropriate wage rates, consistent with local norms.

My Department established a CSP Support Fund for a fixed period of time (2016-2018) to assist existing services funded under the programme in enhancing their sustainability as social enterprises so that they might be more able to pay the minimum wage. Funding is provided on a sliding scale for up to 3 years from 2016 to 2018.

In 2016, the approved support budget was €515,050. In 2017 the budget is €317,225.

A total of 243 applications to the Fund were received in 2016. Of these, 166 were approved for payment. A total of €515,050 was paid out of the support fund in respect of 2016 allocations. A total of €237,919 has been paid out to date in respect of 2017 allocations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Data

1788. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of domiciliary care applications received, approved and rejected, respectively, in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017; the number of appeals submitted, upheld and rejected respectively in each of the same periods, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37350/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Domiciliary Care Allowance claims 2014 to August 2017;

Year	Applications Received	Approved	Not approved
2014	5743	3104	2062
2015	6422	4186	2102

2016	7434	4996	1683
2017* *To end of August	5772	3801	970

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals 2014 to June 2017;

Year	Appeals Submitted	Appeals Allowed	Appeals Partially Allowed	Appeals not allowed
2014	1193	701	24	334
2015	1258	571	40	266
2016	319	162	6	89
2017* *to end June	432	186	4	81

Disability Allowance Applications

1789. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for a disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37351/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 3 July 2017.

On 29 August 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on her eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Allowance Eligibility

1790. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which a person (details supplied) was entitled to a jobseeker's allowance during the period for which they were overpaid; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37352/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was awarded Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) at €100 per week from 25 August 2016 after her job had ceased.

The Department received information on 2 February 2017 that the person concerned was a full time student on a third level course from 12 September 2016 while concurrently in receipt of her JA payment. As a consequence her Jobseeker's Allowance claim was disallowed for the period 12 September 2016 to 14 February 2017 and an overpayment of €2,233.33 was assessed. The person concerned did not appeal the disallowance decision or overpayment.

The person concerned did not qualify for Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) because she was not getting a qualifying social welfare payment for 234 days immediately before start-

ing the course. Nor she did not apply for BTEA immediately before starting the course.

The person concerned made an application for Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) on 8 August 2017. JA was awarded from 8 August 2017 at a rate of €102.70 less an overpayment repayment of €10.00 per week.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

1791. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the situation that applies when assessing the old age pension entitlement of persons that have during their lifetime spent a period of their working life in prison; if an allowance is made in calculating their entitlement to a contributory pension in view of the fact that they could neither make a paid contribution or sign for credits during the period of their incarceration; if not, if there are exceptions; if there is a precedent in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37353/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In Ireland, as in other countries, the contributory pension (which is one of three pensions paid by the Department of Social Protection to those over 66) is aimed primarily at people with sustained contributions towards the Social Insurance Fund which finances it, on a pay as you go basis. Contributions to the Fund are rewarded with greater entitlements and coverage for a range of benefits, including contributory pension entitlements. It is important to ensure that those qualifying for a contributory pension have made a sustained contribution to the Social Insurance Fund over their working lives. To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension (contributory), all contributions paid or credited over their working life from when they first enter insurable employment until pension age are taken into account when assessing their entitlement and the level of that entitlement.

There is no facility to award contributions for time spent in prison. Any change to this would require significant policy and legislative changes, and would also require additional funding, from the PRSI and tax paid by workers and taxpayers.

Where a person does not qualify for the maximum rate of State Pension Contributory (SPC), they may be entitled to the State Pension Non-Contributory (SPNC), where the current maximum rate is payable at €227, which is over 95% that of the maximum SPC rate. While the SPNC is means tested, there are a number of disregards which result in most such people being paid at that maximum rate. People who are not entitled to a SPNC payment would have significant alternative means.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

International Agreements

1792. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the agreement between Ireland and South Korea concerning pensions, which results in a person being unable to collect contributions upon their departure from their second country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37354/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The social security agreement between Ireland and the Republic of Korea, which is provided for in the Social Welfare (Agreement With the Republic of Korea on Social Security) Order 2008 (S.I.

No. 552 of 2008), enables periods of social insurance completed in Ireland and in the Republic of Korea to be taken into account, where necessary, by either State in order to qualify for certain benefits and pensions.

In effect, this Agreement protects the pension rights of people who have worked and paid reckonable social security contributions in Ireland and in Korea by allowing the person to combine the period of contributions in each country, if necessary, to qualify for a pension payment under either Irish or Korean law.

The Agreement ensures that the contributions paid retain a value, even when the person leaves Korea. For instance, they would be particularly important if the person should need to claim an Irish invalidity pension or survivor's pension within a few years of returning to Ireland. Similarly, if the person did not have enough Irish contributions for State pension entitlement on reaching pension age, the Korean contributions would be added to their Irish contributions for this purpose.

A key objective of the Agreement is to allow social insurance contributions paid in Ireland and Korea to be aggregated, as necessary, when considering an insured contributor's entitlement to the range of pensions covered. The return of social security contributions paid in either Ireland or Korea, where the person concerned moves back to their home country, would undermine one of main purposes of this Agreement.

In the circumstances there are no plans to change this situation.

Social Welfare Appeals

1793. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37355/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 1 August 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1794. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37356/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 27 March 2017.

Carer's allowance was awarded to the person concerned on 11 August 2017 with effect from

11 September 2017

13 July 2017, the date the care recipient was discharged from hospital, and the first payment issued to their nominated post office on 17 August 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 13 July 2017 to 16 August 2017 have also issued.

The person concerned was notified on 11 August 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1795. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37357/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 21 June 2017. Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 29 August 2017.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Social Welfare Payments Administration

1796. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of back money in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37358/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my department is currently reviewing the entitlement of the person concerned.

On 3 August 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his eligibility. No response has been received to date. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1797. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a domiciliary care allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37359/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing

of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA in respect of this child was received on 25 July 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date of when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being dealt with were received in April and May 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

1798. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated amount it would cost the State to exclude maintenance payments from means assessment for social welfare payments; if she has previously investigated the feasibility of same; if she will consider this action as part of budget 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37364/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Where a social welfare claimant is in receipt of maintenance payments from a spouse/partner, housing costs incurred by the social welfare claimant (e.g. rent or mortgage payments and/or home improvement loan) up to a maximum of €95.23 per week may be offset against the maintenance payment, with half the balance of the maintenance being assessed as means. These arrangements ensure that there is always an incentive to receive a maintenance payment. The cost of disregarding all maintenance received by a welfare claimant across all relevant schemes is not readily available.

Where a social welfare claimant is paying maintenance to another person, the means assessment of this maintenance paid varies by the type of social welfare scheme.

Social welfare legislation specifically provides that maintenance payments paid under a separation order by recipients of certain social welfare schemes are to be deducted from any assessment of their income. This provision applies to the state pension non-contributory, widow/er's and surviving civil partner's non-contributory pension, carer's allowance, one-parent family payment, and the blind pension.

In the case of claimants of other schemes, however, such as jobseeker's allowance, disability allowance and supplementary welfare allowance, their means for social welfare purposes are their means before they meet any maintenance payment obligations, i.e. no account is taken of such payments in assessing the means of the maintenance payer.

It is not possible to provide the cost of excluding maintenance payments made by social welfare claimants, as the relevant data are not available.

Any change to the current arrangements would have to be considered in the overall policy and budgetary context.

Back to Work Allowance Eligibility

1799. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if back to work allowance can be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); if their eligibility can be urgently reconsidered in view of their anxiety to work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37366/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to work enterprise allowance (BTWEA) scheme is available to support persons who are long-term unemployed and wish to develop or take up self-employment opportunities in a new enterprise. The scheme allows a qualified person to retain a reducing proportion of their social protection payment, plus secondary benefits over a two year period. However, it is important to note that if the business proposed does not involve the setting up a new enterprise it will not be eligible for support under the scheme.

The person concerned wishes to commence taxi driving and has agreed to rent a car and radio from a local taxi company. Taxi drivers are not supported under BTWEA for new business start-ups and in this instance the taxi business is already an established business. The person concerned has been offered an appointment with a Case Officer to discuss further options. He is also working with the local Jobpath provider who are working with him in this regard also.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

1800. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an invalidity pension will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37367/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman referred to on 16 June 2017. He was refused IP on the grounds that the medical conditions for the scheme were not satisfied. He was notified on the 16 August 2017 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

1801. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if release from the Jobpath programme can be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37368/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The aim of the JobPath service is to assist participants in finding sustainable full-time paid employment by providing intensive individual support and assistance. The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) provides income support for underemployed farmers who are in receipt of specific social

welfare supports. Participants are engaged for 19½ hours per week to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. When selected for the JobPath activation service in January this year, the person in question was not actively farming and was in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance. It is a condition of the receipt of this payment that a recipient must be capable of, available for and actively seeking full time employment. The Department select jobseekers on a random basis for referral to the JobPath service.

The person concerned has not to date submitted an application form for the RSS or have an offer of a place on the scheme. It should be noted that participation on the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) is intended to be temporary and is subject to review through an annual application for a continued place on the scheme. His time with the JobPath service commenced in January 2017 and he is therefore required to remain with the JobPath service for the full 52 week duration.

At the end of his participation with the JobPath service if he has not been successful in finding sustainable full time employment, he will be referred back to his local DSP office for an assessment by the Intreo Case Officer, who will support him to apply for other activation employment programmes such as Community Employment, Tús and RSS if appropriate.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1802. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37369/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for Carer's Allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 20 July 2017.

The application is currently being examined by a deciding officer and once processed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions Payments

1803. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reinstate the State transition pension; her further plans to prevent persons forced to retire at 65 years of age having to apply for jobseeker's for one year until they reach the State pensionable age of 66; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37371/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years, which is the current State pension age. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to the new State pension age. Where this is not possible, and where they are available for work, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday.

Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age. Reversing this measure would have a significant Exchequer cost. In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension.

However, it is estimated that well over half of that cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have been two Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It is estimated that the net saving in 2018 is likely to be in the region of €84 million, and this is expected to rise to €87 million by 2020. These figures do not include future rate increases.

Reversing this decision would, therefore, significantly increase the annual cost of State pensions, and would reduce the funds available to pay for any future increases in the rate of the payment.

Each year more people are living to pension age and living longer in retirement. As a result of this demographic change, the number of State pension recipients is increasing year on year. This has significant implications for the future costs of State pension provision which are currently increasing by some €1 billion every 5 years. The purpose of changes to the State pension age is to make the pension system more sustainable in the context of increasing life expectancy. This sustainability is vital, if the current workers, who fund State pension payments through their PRSI, are to receive a pension themselves when they reach retirement age.

The Deputy should note that there is no statutory retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers. While such a contract may originally have been entered into with a retirement date of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

In January 2016, an Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, was established specifically to examine the implications arising from prevailing retirement ages. The final report of the Group made a number of recommendations to support working and retirement practices. This included a request to the Workplace Relations Commission to prepare a Code of Practice under Section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990 to help manage the engagement between employers and employees regarding retirement issues and longer working. The final report, the recommendations of which were accepted by Government in August 2016, is available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1804. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37372/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I

am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Overpayments

1805. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the grounds upon which overpayment has been registered against a person (details supplied); if same can be reviewed with particular reference to entitlement to alternative payment during the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37373/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of a One Parent Family (OPF) payment from 4 November 2010 until 26 April 2017.

Following an investigation into undeclared means relating to employment, her one OPF claim was discontinued in accordance with Departmental legislation and procedures. An overpayment of €20,664.44 was raised relating to the period 2 July 2015 to 26 April 2017 and a notification letter issued to her dated 6 September 2017.

The person concerned was informed of her right to appeal the decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Social Welfare Appeals

1806. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in respect of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37374/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 13 June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1807. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for domiciliary carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37375/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA in respect of this child was received on 2 June 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date of when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in April and May 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1808. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37376/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 24 May 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 2 August 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Partial Capacity Benefit Scheme Administration

1809. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to extend the partial capacity scheme for public sector workers that wish to work part time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37377/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Partial capacity benefit (PCB) allows a person to return to work if they have reduced capacity, and continue to receive a payment from the Department. To qualify for the PCB scheme, a person needs to be currently in receipt of either illness benefit (for a

minimum of 6 months) or invalidity pension.

Public servants who were in employment before 6 April 1995 and continued to be so employed without a break in service, are insured at the modified rates of PRSI contribution, classes B, C and D. Persons paying such contributions are not eligible for the PCB scheme as the qualifying schemes, illness benefit or invalidity pension, are not covered by these contributions. Public servants therefore, who were recruited after 6 April 1995 pay PRSI class A and are eligible for the full range of benefits under the social insurance schemes, including PCB.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1810. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37378/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks, at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA in respect of this child was received on 24 April 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date of when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in April 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1811. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an application for carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) whose application was received on 3 June 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37379/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that the department received an incomplete application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on the 8 June 2017.

The application form submitted is an abbreviated version of the application form, intended to be used only by a person already in receipt of CA, who is applying for an increase in respect of an additional care recipient. This abbreviated version of the form contains no questions in respect of a person's means, as in the normal course of events, the person's means would already have been determined.

As the person concerned is not already in receipt of CA, a full application form has been sent to her for completion.

On receipt of the fully completed application and supporting documentation, the application will be processed and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Medical Card Administration

1812. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if community welfare officers are responsible for monitoring the deaths of medical card holders against the names on general practitioner lists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37381/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Welfare Service transferred to this Department from the Health Service Executive in October 2011 and administer the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. All aspects of the administration of the medical card scheme are dealt with by the Health Service Executive.

Questions in relation to the operation of the medical card scheme are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Paternity Leave Data

1813. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications that have been made for paternity leave by county since the allowance was introduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37384/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The paternity benefit scheme became operational on 1 September 2016. The number of claims received and awarded in the period 1 September 2016 to 31 August 2017 is set out in the table. Detail on the number of people who have received paternity benefit, broken down by county is included in the second table.

Paternity Benefit Claims			
Received		24639	
Awarded		23504	
Recipients by county			
Carlow	256	Longford	163
Cavan	386	Louth	601
Clare	531	Mayo	605
Cork	2936	Meath	983
Donegal	646	Monaghan	306
Dublin	6488	Offaly	350
Galway	1310	Roscommon	285
Kerry	628	Sligo	315
Kildare	1191	Tipperary	723
Kilkenny	462	Waterford	528
Laois	353	Westmeath	424

Leitrim	160	Wexford	676
Limerick	900	Wicklow	680

Carer's Allowance Applications

1814. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a half carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37393/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 22 May 2017.

One of the qualifying conditions is that the means of the person concerned must be less than the statutory limit.

Following an investigation it was determined that the means of the person concerned were not less than the statutory limit and that she was therefore not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 4 September 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Departmental Banking

1815. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost her department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37398/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The costs my department incurred in each of the past five years (2012 to 2016 inclusive) due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees are outlined in table:

Year/De- scription	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Annual Fee	€103.00	€155.00	€160.91	€93.00	€140.54	€652.45
Govern- ment Duty	€108.28	€90.00	€90.00	€120.00	€150.00	€558.28
Interest and other charges	0	€172.70	€30.01	€3.80	€4.82	€211.33
Total	€211.28	€417.70	€280.92	€216.80	€295.36	€1,422.06

The payments were made to Bank of Ireland and American Express.

Credit card fees and expenses are incurred wholly and exclusively in the course of conducting normal Departmental business.

Departmental Staff Data

1816. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of men and women, respectively, in her Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37399/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following tables give a breakdown of the women and men employed by this Department in the following grades: Secretary General, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Principal and Assistant Principal. This Department has no officers serving at the Second Secretary grade.

Female			Male		
Grade	FTE	People	Grade	FTE	People
SEC GEN	0.00	0.00	SEC GEN	1.00	1.00
DEP SEC	1.00	1.00	DEP SEC	0.00	0.00
ASC	5.00	5.00	ASC	4.00	4.00
PO	40.30	43.00	PO	48.80	50.00
AP	108.93	113.00	AP	154.15	155.00
Total	155.23	162.00	Total	207.95	210.00

Departmental Staff Data

1817. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of women and men respectively employed in her department, in tabular form. [37400/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following table gives a breakdown of women and men employed in this Department by grade as at the end of July 2017:

Female			Male		
Grade	FTE	People	Grade	FTE	People
Secretary General	0.00	0.00	Secretary General	1.00	1.00
DeputySecretary	1.00	1.00	DeputySecretary	0.00	0.00
AssistantSecretary	5.00	5.00	AssistantSecretary	4.00	4.00
PrincipalOfficer	40.30	43.00	PrincipalOfficer	48.80	50.00
Assistant-Principal	108.93	113.00	Assistant-Principal	154.15	155.00
Higher Executive Officer	965.70	1030.00	Higher Executive Officer	536.70	541.00
AdministrativeOfficer	7.60	8.00	AdministrativeOfficer	16.76	17.00
ExecutiveOfficer	998.69	1073.00	ExecutiveOfficer	446.95	449.00

ClericalOf-ficer	1971.64	2172.00	ClericalOf-ficer	584.33	595.00
ServiceOf-ficer	14.97	26.00	ServiceOf-ficer	130.12	132.00
Total	4113.84	4471.00	Total	1922.81	1944.00

Child Benefit Eligibility

1818. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review the rule that parents of those that are 18 years of age and over do not receive child benefit even if they remain in full-time secondary level education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37440/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to around 626,362 families in respect of over 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

Given the universality of Child Benefit, allowing for it to be paid in respect of 18 year olds still in full time education would not be a targeted approach. The adoption of such a proposal would also have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Families on low incomes can avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- Increase for a Qualified Child (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- Family Income Supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

I am satisfied these schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby supports low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Child Benefit Waiting Times

1819. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will increase resources for the assessment of carer's allowance payments in order that the processing time is dramatically reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37441/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. Performance indicators relating to service delivery are set out in detail in the Department's Customer Action Plan, including processing time targets for the main welfare schemes.

The processing times target for the carer's allowance scheme is 70% in 12 weeks. This target reflects the fact that there are many questions which have to be considered before a decision can be made on entitlement to carer's allowance, specifically in relation to habitual residence, the care requirements of the person being cared for, as well as the means of and the level of care being provided by, the carer in each case.

In addition there has been significant changes in the numbers of applications being received and also in the decision making process, on foot of a High Court decision.

At the end of July 2017, the average processing time was 14 weeks and there were 4,847 applications awaiting decision. This is an improvement on the same period in 2016 when there were 5,673 applications awaiting decision and the average processing time was 18 weeks. This improvement has been achieved against the background of a 16-20% annual increase in applications over the last two years.

Frequently, delays in processing are outside the control of the Department and are caused by the customer failing to fully complete the claim form or failing to attach the supporting documentation that is requested on the application form.

Operational processes, procedures and the organisation of work are continually reviewed to ensure that processing capability is maximised.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

1820. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to accept applications for new projects under the community service programme in 2017; when she plans to put out a call for new projects; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37466/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the Community Services Programme (CSP) is designed to support community companies in providing local social, economic and environmental services through the application of a social enterprise model of delivery. Funding is provided to support the employment of staff to deliver these services.

Earlier this year, my Department announced a call for proposals under strand 3 of CSP, which focuses on social enterprises that employ those people who are most distant from the labour market. Successful applicants from this call have now been invited to begin business planning with Pobal, who operate the scheme on behalf of my Department.

In addition, as resources allow, my Department may consider new applications received from organisations that have expressed an interest in and are considered eligible under the programme.

Any not-for-profit company wishing to be considered for the programme can request an Expression of Interest form from my Department at cspinfo@welfare.ie.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

1821. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a new scheme (details supplied) for self-employed persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37471/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): In line with the commitment contained in the Programme for Government for an improved PRSI scheme for the self-employed, Budget 2017 provided for the extension of cover for Invalidity Pension to the self-employed on the same basis as employees, with effect from December 2017. This is a major reform as, for the first time, self-employed people will have access to the safety-net of State income supports, without having to go through a means test, if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability.

Given that this is a major change in the social protection system, significant adjustments to operational systems and processes are currently being implemented to support the introduction of this measure in December 2017. Details for self-employed persons as to how to apply for this payment will be made public by my Department before then.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the deputy.

JobPath Implementation

1822. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will amend the current Jobpath scheme to enable those that may be on Jobpath to consider a back to education course or community employment scheme if a suitable opportunity arose. [37500/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Jobseekers, while engaged with the JobPath service, can apply for Back to Education Allowance. While the field of study should relate to the employment preferences agreed by the customer with their JobPath personal advisor, the decision on any application is made by an official in my Department.

Jobseekers who are already participating with the JobPath service will not be referred to Community Employment Schemes (CE) as they can only participate with one activation scheme or service at a time. This allows the scheme and service providers' sufficient time to work with the participants in order to develop their skills and competencies to pursue suitable job opportunities which may result in sustainable employment and also to ensure that the best use is made of the available places on all activation supports.

However, customers who on the date of their referral to JobPath have a written offer with a start date within four weeks for CE will be facilitated to take up the placement. Additionally, in a small number of exceptional cases, which are assessed on a case by case basis, my Department may facilitate a customer to move from one activation support to another.

Those jobseekers that have completed their 52 week engagement with JobPath without finding suitable and sustainable employment are being referred back to their Intreo centres for an assessment by one of my Department's case officers. They may then apply for other activation supports such as CE to build on the skills gained with the JobPath service.

My Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes including JobPath under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1823. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37507/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA was received in the Department from this lady on 22 June 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date of when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in April and May 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

1824. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will make free fuel payments available to social welfare recipients who are also in receipt of disability benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37529/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to low income households, at an estimated cost of €229 million in 2017. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household. My Department also pays an electricity or gas allowance as part of the household benefits package to approximately 429,000 customers, at an estimated cost of €232 million in 2017.

The criteria for Fuel Allowance are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to the Department in as targeted a manner as possible. Depending on their circumstances, disablement benefit can be paid to people in employment, as it is not means-tested, and it is based on a person's PRSI record. However, people in receipt of disablement benefit and who are considered permanently incapable of work as a result of an occupational accident can apply for Incapacity Supplement which is a qualifying payment for fuel allowance.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme a recipient of a social welfare or health service executive payment who has exceptional essential heating costs due to ill health or infir-

imity and who cannot provide for such costs from within his or her own resources may qualify for a heating supplement. There is no standard rate for a heating supplement. Each case is examined on its merits and the Community Welfare Officer determines the amount to be paid taking account of the level of the expenses in question and the ability of the applicant to contribute towards his or her exceptional heating costs.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the Energy Affordability Strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support towards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

Any decision to extend the eligibility criteria for fuel allowance would have to be considered in the overall budgetary negotiations.

Social Welfare Appeals

1825. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37542/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 15 August 2017 who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

Jobseeker's Benefit Payments

1826. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason persons (details supplied) on certain work schemes which are seasonal receive a reduced rate of jobseeker's payment during summer, Christmas and Easter periods; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37545/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The amount of the person's average reckonable weekly earnings in the Governing Contribution Year (GCY) determines the rate of jobseeker's benefit payable. The GCY is the second last complete contribution year before the benefit year in which the claim is made.

To qualify for the full rate of jobseeker's benefit, the weekly earnings in the GCY must be €300.00 or greater. If the average weekly earnings are less than €300, then a lesser rate is payable.

The jobseeker's benefit rates are graduated according to the person's average reckonable weekly earnings in the relevant tax year as follows:

Average weekly earnings	Personal rate	Increase for Qualified Adult
less than €150.00	€86.70	€83.00

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€150.00 and less the €220.00	€124.60	€83.00
€220.00 and less than €300.00	€151.20	€83.00
€300.00 or more	€193.00	€128.10

I hope that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question Heading for question(s) 1827,1839,1840,1842,1847,1868,1871,1896

1827. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of social protection payment recipients that have a public services card in 2016 and in 2017; the number of social protection payment recipients with no public services card in 2016 and in 2017; the number of social protection payments that have been withheld due to the lack of a public services card in 2016 and 2017; the total amount of those withheld payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37550/17]

1839. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person not issued with a public services card but has proven their identity by other means such as a driving licence, passport or passport card can receive a social protection payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37751/17]

1840. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the concerns of families and loved ones of older persons that are in receipt of welfare payments such as pensions caused by the requirement that they hold a public services card in order to access payments in view or the fact that many recipients are not in a position to collect or easily supply the details needed for the I.D. due to the fact that they reside in nursing facilities or are ill; if her attention has been further drawn to similar concerns that the requirement will lead to some older persons losing their entitlements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37759/17]

1842. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if it is a legal requirement for a person to hold a public services card in order to receive social protection payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37767/17]

1847. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to her public statement, the legal basis within the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, that makes a public service card mandatory in order to interact with her department; if a public service card is necessary for all interactions with her department; the reason the operational guidelines for both job seeker's benefit and allowance allow for other forms of identification, such as a passport, for Irish citizens. [37875/17]

1868. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she or bodies and agencies under the remit of her department plans to make services or payments dependant on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependant on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38147/17]

1871. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have been denied a social welfare payment for not being in possession of a public services card or for not having registered for a public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38191/17]

1896. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will supply the precise piece of legislation that underpins the mandatory nature of the public services card in view of the fact that the card is a mandatory requirement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38550/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1827, 1839, 1840, 1842, 1847, 1868, 1871 and 1896 together.

In 2005, the Government agreed a standard for establishing and verifying an individual's identity for the purposes of accessing public services. This standard is known as the Standard Authentication Framework Environment – or “SAFE”.

The SAFE standard has four levels:

- **Safe 0** = No assurance of identity
- **Safe 1** = Balance of probabilities (the minimum authentication level for the allocation of a PPS Number)
- **Safe 2** = Substantial assurance (the minimum authentication level for issuing a Public Services Card)
- **Safe 3** = Beyond reasonable doubt

The Department operates a number of methods to SAFE 2 register a person. The usual method involves a combination of all of the following –

- a face-to-face meeting,
- the collection and verification of the person's Public Service Identity (PSI) data set,
- the examination/validation/verification of at least two documents supporting identity, and
- photo capture and matching.

As part of the verification process the person's photo is run through software to check against other photos that have already been taken during other SAFE 2 registrations. This is to detect and/or prevent duplicate registrations.

Until very recently, the application process for an Irish passport or a Driver's License did not comply with the SAFE 2 standard of identity verification. Therefore, taken individually, neither a passport, nor a driver's license, nor a birth certificate is enough to validate an identity to SAFE Level 2. For this reason, in itself, a passport or a driver's license is not currently acceptable as the required standard of identity verification for access to benefits from my Department. However, in combination and with the other data and processes detailed above they can be used to verify an identity to the SAFE 2 standard.

Once a person completes a SAFE 2 registration they are issued with a Public Services Card (PSC) as a physical token that proves they have had their identity verified to the SAFE 2 standard. Additionally, a person may be issued with a verified MyGovID account, which is a secure online account for accessing public services digitally, and again proves in the online environment that the person has had their identity verified to the SAFE 2 standard. The PSC and MyGovID, in turn, enable individuals gain access to high value and personalised public services, in person and electronically, more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while preserving privacy and security. In the case of services provided by my Department, the PSC is being used to replace the Social Services Card and paper Free Travel pass and

MyGovID is being used to provide access to an increasing number of welfare services online at www.mywelfare.ie.

Accordingly, SAFE Level 2 registration allows a person to verify their identity once for public service purposes because it is to a substantial level of assurance. Consequently, it eliminates the need for a person to repeatedly register their identity information when accessing public services. It makes it more difficult for someone else to claim to be a person and so helps to eliminate “identity theft” and fraudulent access to someone else’s data.

The primary legislative provisions for SAFE registration and identity verification are set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 (as amended) as follows –

- Sections 262 and 263B provide for the verification of identity for issuance and use of a PPS Number.
- Sections 263, 263A and 263B provide for the verification of identity for issuance, use and cancellation of a PSC.
- Section 241 provides that a person must satisfy the Minister to his/her identity when making a new claim.
- Section 247C provides that an existing claimant must satisfy the Minister to his/her identity and provides for disqualification where an existing claimant fails to so do.

In other words, the legislation requires a person to satisfy the Minister as to their identity and allows for disallowance or disqualification from receipt of a benefit in the event that it is not done. It is not possible for a claimant to satisfy the Minister as to his or her identity without registering to SAFE 2. Given that my Department spends over €19bn p.a. on supports and services, we need to be sure that people who access these services are the people who are entitled to receive them and that they don’t access them multiple times under different identities. Accordingly, it is reasonable to ask people to verify their identity to a substantial level of assurance.

The Department makes it clear to customers in receipt of social welfare payments or Free Travel entitlements that they do need to complete a SAFE 2 registration to access, or continue to access, payments and entitlements. In the main, customers are invited to a scheduled registration appointment, completion of which results in the issue of a PSC by post. The Department also issues reminder letters to customers, as required. Customers may also book a different time/date to suit them, either online via www.mywelfare.ie, by contacting the Department’s offices, or by walking in to ask for the next available appointment. The process takes about 15 minutes to complete, once all required documents are presented. While the jobseeker’s benefit and jobseeker’s allowance operational guidelines set out the documents required to provide ‘evidence’ of identity when a person makes a claim, they also make it clear that a person must complete the SAFE 2 registration by getting a PSC to fully verify their identity.

While the default SAFE 2 registration method is ‘face-to-face’ (as set out at Sections 263B, 241 and 247C (3) of the Act), the Department can and does make other arrangements with customers, to elevate their identity verification to the SAFE 2 standard. In line with SAFE principles to build on already existing infrastructure (and subject to appropriate risk analysis, legally based data sharing and the consent of the individual), upgrading existing customers to SAFE Level 2 is undertaken as much as possible using relevant data already held by the State (e.g. Driver’s License, Passport Office, All-Ireland Free Travel Scheme) combined with a number of other items and processes. These are customers whom the Department has been dealing with for some time and who, by virtue of their circumstances, are unlikely to present a

high risk of identity fraud. Pensioners who have had a passport photograph verified in a face-to-face interaction at passport application and Free Travel clients who personally collect their primary Social Welfare payments at a Post Office have availed of processes whereby whatever other information is required to register them to SAFE 2 is provided without them having to attend a Department office centre for a face-to-face interview. In addition, certain persons who have renewed their Driver's Licence since March 2014 and in doing so have provided the Road Safety Authority with personal information and a photograph are also being offered the opportunity to complete the SAFE 2 registration process without attending a Department office. Each of these approaches is further strengthened in that all photographs are subjected to facial image matching against previously held photographs. Additionally, the Department operates a mobile registration solution to cater for those persons incapable (for whatever reason) of attending a Department office. Although this approach works best in congregated environments, individual registrations (for example at a person's residence) can be undertaken in exceptional circumstances.

The Department is in the process of completing SAFE 2 registration of its entire existing customer base. As its customer base is not static, this is an ongoing process. As at 31 December 2016, the number of Departmental customers in payment with a PSC was 1.43M while the number of customers in payment without one was 0.56M. The equivalent numbers as at 31 July 2017 were 1.55M and 0.45M, respectively. These figures are at given points in time and reflect the facts that the Department is in a roll-out phase and that there is considerable movement in the Department's customer base. These figures should not be confused with the total number of PSCs issued to date which stands at approx. 2.8 million.

Registration of the balance of the Department's customers is being progressed, with due regard to customers who are unable to attend in person due to challenges relating to age, mobility or disability. In this regard, customers who had not yet registered for a PSC for Free travel purposes, including many pensioners, were written to earlier this year to ask if they could attend in person to register. Over 32,000 such customers have already received their PSC for Free Travel as a result of this exercise and SAFE appointments at the Department's offices are in hand for some 20,000 more who indicated they could attend. About 10,000 customers, who responded to say they are not able to attend in person, will be facilitated by other means including, where appropriate, postal registration methods or mobile SAFE registration facilities at group and community settings. In this context, I want to make it clear that customers who face bona fide challenges to in-person attendance will not be disadvantaged, in terms of access to payments and/or availing of Free Travel entitlements.

The Department does not collect data on the number of individuals who currently, or who, at any point in time, have had a payment stopped by reason of failing to complete the SAFE 2 registration process. This data is fluid in nature. For example, a considerable number of customers who have a payment or entitlement suspended or stopped subsequently decide to complete the SAFE2 process and have their payment or entitlement reinstated. It should be noted that of the remainder, a considerable portion do not make any contact with the Department. The decision to stop a payment is never made lightly. However, where a customer does not "satisfy the Minister in relation to identity" as per the legislative requirements, a payment can be disqualified. In advance of any such disqualification, the Department makes every effort to engage with the customer to explain the legislative basis for the SAFE 2 registration process and the consequences of potential disqualification. Where a payment has been disqualified and the customer subsequently successfully completes the SAFE 2 registration process, their payment will be reinstated by the Department (assuming they continue to meet all qualifying criteria for that payment).

In other parts of the public service, many of their services have been provided to people

who had their identity verified only to the SAFE Level 1 standard. Since the introduction of SAFE Level 2 registration in 2011, more services are now moving to identity verification at this level to ensure a substantial level of assurance of identity. While it is a matter for each public service provider to determine the appropriate level of identity verification required for each of its services, SAFE Level 2 registration benefits them by removing the need for them to engage in costly and inefficient identity registration processes, by reducing the number of people fraudulently claiming to be someone else, and by facilitating the provision of high-value and personalised public services online.

I hope this clarifies the matter for Deputies.

Social Welfare Benefits Expenditure

1828. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of introducing a weekly €20 “cost of disability” payment to those under 18 years of age and over 18 years of age with a disability; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37552/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The introduction of a “cost of disability” payment would be a major undertaking requiring clear definitions of qualifying conditions and research into the prevalence of these conditions leading to estimates of the numbers of persons who would potentially qualify. It is likely that it would also require significant administrative spending in establishing the information technology and other systems that would be required to administer such a payment.

One indication of the scale of potential additional programme spending would be to estimate the additional annual cost of increasing the main social protection spending programmes that are targeted at long-term illness and disability conditions. These include invalidity pension (for adults with sufficient social insurance contributions) and disability allowance (for persons aged 16-66) and those in receipt of domiciliary care allowance (paid in respect of children under 16 years). It is estimated that the annual cost of increasing these three payments by the equivalent of €20 per week would be of the order of €240 million.

According to recent results from Census 2016, there were some 643,000 people with a disability in the State in April 2016. The cost of introducing a cost of Disability Payment to all of these even if not in receipt of a disability payment would be considerably higher than the estimate based solely on those in receipt of disability related payments above.

There are no plans to establish a cost of disability payment with the social protection system. People with disabilities are not a homogeneous group, and, as such, have widely differing needs with the result that any additional costs of disability would not therefore arise to the same extent in all cases. Some costs associated with disability are already addressed across schemes provided by a number of agencies such as the health service and also the Revenue Commissioners through certain tax reliefs and other supports.

A range of these issues is currently being considered by the Task Force on Personalised Budgets, which has been established under the Programme for Government to consider the commitment to give people with disabilities greater control, independence and choice in terms of obtaining HSE-funded personal social services and supports. Personalised budgets transfer control back to the individual and give them the freedom to source the services and supports which best meet their needs.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

1829. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility criteria for persons wishing to participate in community employment schemes; if persons are only deemed eligible for the scheme in circumstances in which they are in receipt of payments from her Department for a specific period such as jobseekers' allowance or jobseekers' benefit, or if all persons signing on are eligible for inclusion as part of the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37626/17]

1830. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility criteria for persons wishing to participate in community work placement schemes; if participants are only deemed eligible for said schemes in circumstances in which they are in receipt of payments from her Department for a specific period such as jobseekers' allowance or jobseekers' benefit, or if all persons signing on eligible for inclusion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37627/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1829 and 1830 together.

The aim of employment schemes like Community Employment (CE) and Tús is to enhance the employability and skills of unemployed persons by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. These schemes help unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce by breaking their experience of unemployment through a return to work routine.

One of the requirements to be eligible to participate on these employment schemes is that a person must be in receipt of a qualifying payment from my Department for a minimum period of 12 months.

Persons who do not qualify for a social welfare payment but are signing for credited PRSI contributions, do not meet the current eligibility requirements for participation on either CE or the Tús scheme. Persons signing for credits may, however, be eligible for other programmes or support to help them return to work. Such persons are advised to contact their local Intreo Office where a case officer will be available to discuss the employment and training options that are open to them.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

1831. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if housing assistance payment will eventually replace the longterm rent supplement scheme; if these two schemes are still in existence; the differences between the two schemes; the person or body which administers both schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37628/17]

1867. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of households in receipt of rent supplement that have transferred to the housing assistance payment in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38134/17]

1901. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of households in receipt of rent supplement, by county, in tabular form; the number of households in each county that have rent supplement increased above the prescribed limits for their area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38567/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection(Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1831, 1867 and 1901 together.

In recognition of the on-going rental market difficulties, the Department continues to implement a targeted case-by-case policy approach in the administration of rent supplement that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits. In addition, the Protocol arrangement in place with Threshold continues to operate in the areas where supply issues are particularly acute covering Dublin, Cork, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow and Galway City. To date in 2017, in excess of 1,360 recipients have been supported with increased rent payments. A county breakdown of these payments, along with statistics in relation to rent supplement recipients as at end August 2017 is provided in the attached tabular statement.

A key difference between rent supplement and the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is their intended target customer base. Under HAP, responsibility for the provision of rental assistance for those with a long-term social housing is met by the local authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG). Rent supplement will continue to be paid to households who are already in the private rented sector but who, generally because of a loss of income through unemployment, require a short term income support to pay their rent.

In general, persons who are in receipt of rent supplement for over 18 months are being requested to contact their local authority to have their housing needs assessed beginning the transfer process to HAP. New applicants who have been deemed as having long term housing needs are being supported by the Local Authorities under HAP directly rather than seeking rent supplement support.

Under HAP, the local authority pays the rent directly to the landlord and the HAP recipient will then pay a rent contribution to the local authority. The rent contribution is a differential rent, which is set by the local authority based on income and the customer’s ability to pay. A significant difference between the HAP scheme and rent supplement is that HAP has been designed to allow households with a long term housing need to secure full-time employment and continue to remain in the scheme. There are currently 26,400 HAP tenancies in place of which some 7,980 (30%) are direct transfers from rent supplement. Details of rent supplement recipients transferring to HAP in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017 are provided in the attached tabular statement. Under the targets outlined in the Action plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, the aim is to complete the transfers from rent supplement by 2020.

Officials in my Department continue to work closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and local authorities to facilitate the ongoing transfer of cases from rent supplement.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputies.

Public Services Card

1832. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the implementation of the public services card across the country; if it will become mandatory across all Departments; the timeframe for same; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [37652/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In all, approx. 2.8m Public Services Cards (PSC) have issued since SAFE registration commenced in 2011. 66% of adults resident in the State have now completed registration to SAFE Level 2 (substantial assurance of identity) which is the minimum for issue of a PSC.

SAFE registration facilities are available at over 100 of the Department's locations nationally, and in at least one location in every county in the State.

With respect to the use of the PSC by other Departments, I have informed by my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that "it is not mandatory for residents in Ireland to be SAFE 2 registered, though a growing number of public services that require proof of identity of individuals will be underpinned by the SAFE 2 standard, ensuring services are provided to the correct people in an efficient manner, while protecting their data. The recently published eGovernment Strategy 2017 – 2020, lists a number of public services for which SAFE 2 registration will be required. Others are likely to be listed in the future. The transition plans, including communications, interim arrangements, exceptions, etc., will be worked through by the Departments with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

SAFE 2 offers a standard way of identifying citizens that will reduce the administrative burden both on the service providers and on the citizens accessing the services. The registration process also offers the most robust identity proofing process to protect personal data used within Government. As such it is Government policy that SAFE registration is required for access to all services that require proof of a person's identity. The SAFE 2 process is essential for Ireland to be aligned with the EC EIDAS legislation, which is a key aspect of the EC eGovernment Action Plan and Digital Single Market Strategy."

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities

1833. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the types of job schemes that are or will be available for young persons with disabilities in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37745/17]

1834. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which her Department is improving services for persons with disabilities and mental health issues in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area. [37746/17]

1835. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the investment made by her Department since March 2016 in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37747/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1833 to 1835, inclusive, together.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a wide range of work related supports for people with disabilities, which are voluntary in nature.

One of the principal supports is the EmployAbility service, which provides job coach sup-

port to people with disabilities in accessing jobs in the open labour market. The service is currently delivered nationwide by 23 limited companies, each with a specific geographical remit and each fully funded by the Department. Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath is serviced by two EmployAbility companies: EmployAbility Cavan/Monaghan and EmployAbility Meath.

Other employment supports available to people with disabilities in the Cavan, Monaghan and North Meath area include the provision of employment subsidies through the Wage Subsidy Scheme, Workplace Adaptation Grants and specialist training courses that are specifically designed for people with disabilities. Furthermore, participation in community employment (CE) schemes and the rural social scheme is also open to people with disabilities.

The Department has rolled out its full Intreo service to people with disabilities who wish to avail of the service on a voluntary basis. In such cases, people with disabilities who present at an Intreo Centre will be offered an interview by an employment support officer with a view to agreeing a suitable action plan. People with disabilities in the Cavan, Monaghan and North Meath areas who wish to access the service can do so at their local Intreo Centres located in Cavan and Navan.

Since June 2015, one of the four pilot projects participating in the Integrating Employment and Mental Health Support Project (IEMHS) was located in Cavan/Monaghan. In this project, my Department has collaborated with the HSE, Genio and Mental Health Reform, with the aim of demonstrating how existing mental health and supported employment (EmployAbility) services can fulfil the best practice Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment. Although this project is currently coming to an end, the project has demonstrated good outcomes through improved integration between mental health services and employment support services. An evaluation report is currently being completed, which will provide lessons for the mainstreaming of this approach.

In relation to the level of investment made by my Department since March 2016 in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area, statistics on expenditure at county level are not compiled by my Department.

The Government remains committed to facilitating increased participation in employment for persons with a disability. The challenge now is to improve on the programmes for people with disabilities by focusing on ability rather than disability and to enhance their potential and achieve greater independence through education, training and employment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Payments

1836. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the costs of reversing all cuts and changes to child benefit since 2008. [37748/17]

1838. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated annual cost of increasing maternity benefits to 300 euro per week. [37750/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1836 and 1838 together.

The current Child Benefit rate is €140 per month for each child. For twins, the rate is one and a half times the normal monthly rate for each child. For triplets and other multiple births, Child Benefit is paid at double the normal monthly rate for each child, provided at least three

of the children remain qualified.

In April 2008, the Child Benefit rate for the first and second child was €166 per month and the rate for the third and subsequent children was €203 per month. At this time, Child Benefit was payable in respect of children who were aged 18 and still in full-time education. There was also a Special Grant of €635 which was payable at birth for all multiple births and further grants of €635 were paid when these children were aged 4 and 12. The cost of implementing all of these measures is estimated to be close to €627 million in 2018.

The cost of increasing both the Maternity and Adoptive Benefits to €300 per week is estimated to be almost €69 million in 2018. In addition, the estimated cost of increasing Paternity Benefit (which is paid at the same rate of €235 per week) to €300 per week is €2.7 million in 2018.

It should be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

Maternity Benefit

1837. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of extending paid maternity leave to 42 weeks or 52 weeks. [37749/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Maternity Benefit is paid by my Department and is based on payment of PRSI contributions while working. The current entitlement to paid maternity leave is 26 weeks. The table below estimates the additional cost of increasing the duration of paid maternity leave by 16 weeks to 42 weeks and by 26 weeks to 52 weeks. These estimates are based on the cost for a full year and assume that any increase in duration is implemented from the beginning of the year. The estimated additional cost of extending the duration of maternity benefit is approximately €10.3 million for each extra week, at the current rate of €235 per week.

Estimated annual cost of increasing the duration of maternity benefit based on 2017 rates	
No. of additional weeks	Estimated cost (€m)
16	164.8
26	267.8

It should be noted that this costing is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2017. It should also be noted that there are additional costs to the Exchequer as these estimates do not include the costs of salary top-ups for public/civil servants.

Question No. 1838 answered with Question No. 1836.

Questions Nos. 1839 and 1840 answered with Question No. 1827.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1841. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an appeal (details supplied) for an invalidity pension will be finalised. [37764/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 13th June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 18th July 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1842 answered with Question No. 1827.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

1843. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount of funding provided as part of the humanitarian assistance scheme activated after unprecedented flooding occurred in County Donegal during the week of 22 August, 2017; the number of persons in receipt of this assistance from that period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37781/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department immediately activated its humanitarian assistance scheme, administered by the local Community Welfare Service (CWS), to assist householders in County Donegal affected by flooding following the recent severe weather conditions.

The purpose of the humanitarian assistance scheme is to prevent hardship by providing income-tested financial support to people whose homes are damaged from flooding and severe weather events and who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, replacement of household items and in some instances structural repair. In dealing with emergency events of this nature, the Department generally adopts a three stage approach as follows:]

- Stage 1 is to provide emergency income support payments (food, clothing and personal items) in the immediate aftermath of the event. A relatively small amount of financial assistance is generally provided initially.

- Stage 2 generally involves the replacement of white goods, basic furniture items and other essential household items. It is not until the flood water abates and houses dry out that the full extent of the damage to homes will become fully known.

- Stage 3 is to identify what longer term financial support or works are required. It could take some time before this stage of response commences and this involves a cross Departmental/Agency response. Works carried out can include plastering, dry-lining, relaying of floors, electrical re-wiring and painting.

The Department has provided financial support under Stage 1 to over 130 affected households and payments are continuing to be processed, including some under Stage 2. The Government has not set a limit on the amount that can be paid to an individual household under this scheme. Levels of payment depend on the relative severity of damage experienced and the household's ability to meet these costs ensuring that the funding is appropriately targeted. The

scheme is demand led and there is a time-lag between the flooding event and actual claims for financial support.

It is unclear at this time the response the level of funding that will be required to return homes to a habitable condition. However, it is expected that the value of payments under the scheme will increase as we continue to move into Stage 2 and Stage 3 supports.

People seeking assistance under the humanitarian assistance scheme should contact their local Intreo Centre where CWS staff are available to offer assistance or contact the Buncrana Intreo Centre on 074 9364600.

Further information on the scheme is available on the Department's website: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Humanitarian-Assistance-Scheme.aspx>.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1844. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37786/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 27 June 2017.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 4 September 2017 and the first payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 26 September 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 29 June 2017 to 25 September 2017 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 4 September 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

1845. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal to a decision on a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37787/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 8th August 2017 and that the Appeals Officer is now considering the appeal in the light of all of the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the oral hearing. The person concerned will be notified of the Appeals Officer's decision when the appeal has been determined.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pensions

1846. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will respond to the Citizens Assembly recommendations regarding a mandatory pension scheme to supplement the State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37819/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rate of supplementary pension coverage in Ireland is 47% of the working population and this reduces to 35% when the private sector is considered in isolation. Whilst the State pension provides a reasonable basic level of income and guards against poverty in retirement, if measures are not taken to address this low rate of coverage, many future retirees will experience unwanted reductions in living standards when they reach retirement. Therefore, I would welcome the broad support for reform evident in July 2017 in the Citizen's Assembly deliberations regarding retirement income and where 87% agreed with the proposal that the Government should introduce some form of mandatory pension scheme to supplement the State pension.

I intend to make pension reform a priority in my term as Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. To this end, I can confirm my intention in the coming months to publish and commence the implementation of a number of measures for the reform of pensions. In addition to a range of other long term reform measures, I will detail proposals for a transition from the current and purely voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will, subject to certain parameters, automatically enrol employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement. It will increase the wellbeing, financial security and independence of future retirees.

A review of international auto enrolment retirement systems has confirmed that success is dependent on well tested design and securing member trust. To this end, detailed evidence building and consultation will be undertaken to inform fundamental choices which are required regarding the preferred operational structure and organisational governance for a new system as well as design elements such contribution levels, financial incentives and target membership. Correctly positioning/designing each of these will be critical to the success of any system.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1847 answered with Question No. 1827.

Departmental Staff Data

1848. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the staff costs to date in 2017, based on her Department's request for 200 additional staff over a four year period regarding those only directly involved in the public service card project; the staff costs for staff involved in the internal upgrade of the ICT systems; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37876/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In all, 2.8m Public Services Cards (PSC) have issued since SAFE registration commenced in

2011, and 66% of adults resident in the State have now completed registration to SAFE Level 2 (substantial assurance of identity), which is the minimum for issue of a PSC.

SAFE registration facilities are available at over 100 of the Department's locations nationally, and in at least one location in every county in the State. In-person SAFE registrations currently exceed 12,000 weekly.

Currently the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has sanctioned a total of up to 218 posts for the Public Services Card project. These posts include both temporary and permanent roles, and the numbers and locations of deployed staff are kept under constant review to ensure the best use of resources.

As of July 2017 there are 55.63 full-time-equivalent permanent staff (FTE) and 146 Temporary Clerical Officers working on the PSC Project. These figures include four full-time IT staff assigned to the PSC project. This represents a full-year staff cost of €5,857,888.33.

Public Services Card

1849. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of helpdesk staff in her Department and the costs associated with calls from customers to request activation of the public service card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37878/17]

1852. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of public service cards produced; the number of cards that have been activated to date in 2017, in view of the fact that at the end of June 2016, over two million public service cards had been produced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37885/17]

1930. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the outcome of completing the activation process on public services cards with respect to the use of the card; if the card can be used without being activated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38976/17]

1931. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of non activated public services cards which are currently in circulation; the steps she is taking to ensure they are in the possession of the correct person; the safeguards in place to ensure non activated cards are not used by persons other than the correct cardholder; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38977/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1849, 1852, 1930 and 1931 together.

In all, approximately 2.8m Public Services Cards (PSC) have issued since SAFE registration commenced in 2011.

At the time of the commencement of the roll-out of the Public Services Card (PSC) in 2011, the then Data Protection Commissioner requested that controls be put place to ensure that PSCs were getting to the correct people. As a result, the Department requested that customers, on receipt of their PSC, make contact by telephone to confirm receipt of their card. This process was known as 'activation'.

As part of the procurement of the production, personalisation, distribution and management of the PSC, the managed service provider was charged with the provision of a helpdesk facility

to deal with customer enquiries including ‘activation’ calls. The number of staff on the helpdesk is dependent on the call volumes at any time.

Things have changed since the Data Protection Commissioner’s original request. Firstly, the PSC is sent to an address that has already been verified during the SAFE registration process within days of that process, i.e., there is no delay between registration and issuance of the card. Secondly, as more public bodies use the PSC and with the introduction of MyGovID, the opportunities for confirmation that cards have been received by the correct person have increased. Thirdly, the registration process now facilitates the capture and verification of mobile phone details. Accordingly, the Department considered that the ‘activation’ service was no longer required and decided to cease asking customers to ring to confirm receipt of their PSC with effect from August 2016.

There is no activation process for cards post issue. All issued cards are valid.

Calls to the customer support helpdesk (the majority of which were ‘activation’ calls) up to September 2016 cost €3.1 million including VAT.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Public Services Card

1850. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated costs of developing and issuing public service cards in 2017; if she has made provision for further costs in 2018 and 2019; the cost of the managed service provider contract to date in 2017; the duration of the contract with the service provider; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37882/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The roll out of Public Services cards is demand led. As a result it isn’t possible to precisely predict the volumes of cards will be issued or their costs over a given period of time. My Department has made a provision of some €5.2M to cover all costs associated with the PSC project in 2017. The Department’s estimates for 2018 and 2019 have not been finalised with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

To the end of July 2017, the latest date for which statistics are available, payments amounting to €3.626M including VAT, have been made to the managed service provider for card production and the provision of a customer helpdesk.

The contract with the managed service provider is scheduled to run to the end of this year.

Public Services Card

1851. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will publish the original business case for the SAFE public service card project that was under development in the early 2000s; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37883/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): While a single document business case was not produced in the early 2000’s, the Department did endeavour, in as much as was then possible, to set out the constituent elements of a business case in the 2004 and 2005 Memoranda for Government and various associated papers (includ-

ing the Account Study into the PSC and the SAFE Business Requirements).

In his 2015 Report on the Accounts of the Public Services, the C&AG found that elements of a good practice business case were included in several documents examined.

Given the innovative nature of the project and the fact that there weren't any ready references for comparison purposes, it was not possible in the early stages of the project to determine precise costs and staffing requirements. Accordingly, the Department developed the project in phases and prepared costs and staffing requirements once they became known through these various phases.

The first phase of the project involved the research and design of a card and associated processes. From July 2005 to July 2007 the Department concentrated on the development of the detailed functional specification required for the PSC. It also developed a project proposal for the development and deployment of the PSC and associated infrastructure. This led to a submission in July 2007 to the Department's Management Board resulting in the Board giving its approval to proceed with the project proposal and with the preparation of a Request for Tender for an outsourced card management service.

The second phase then was to undertake this procurement exercise for a managed services contract for the production of the card. This was completed in 2009 and then provided the Department with definitive costs for this element of the project.

The third phase was the operation of a trial or pilot to test how registration processes and card production facilities would work in practice. Once this was completed it was then possible to determine the staffing levels that would be required to undertake the customer registration processes countrywide. It would not have been possible to determine the staffing requirement in advance of this phase. This was completed in 2011 culminating in the Department's request for sanction to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in that year.

The fourth phase was implementation which began gradually as resources became available and registration infrastructure was deployed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1852 answered with Question No. 1849.

JobPath Data

1853. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have been referred to Jobpath since its introduction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37912/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. The service is delivered by two companies, Seetec and Turas Nua.

The service was rolled out on a phased basis over the period mid-2015 to July 2016. The numbers referred initially were low but this has increased with circa 119,000 Jobseekers having commenced with the service by September 2017. It is important to note, Jobseekers may be supported through the service for up to 30 months - under the service jobseekers have access

to a personal adviser (PA) who works with them over two phases. During the first phase, of 12 months duration, the PA provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work. During this phase the PA continues to work with the jobseeker for a further period of at least three months, and up to 12 months. In addition to the two phases Jobseekers may also undertake training while with the service and this may extend the period the jobseeker is supported through the service for up to a further 6 months.

Community Employment Schemes Data

1854. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of places available on community employment schemes; the number of persons participating in community employment schemes from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37913/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The aim of the Community Employment (CE) programme is to enhance the employability of disadvantaged and unemployed people by providing work experience and training opportunities for them within their communities. The programme helps break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. My Department is also conscious of the valuable contribution these schemes are making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

The Department for Employment Affairs and Social Protection assumed responsibility for the Community Employment (CE) Programme from FÁS in January 2012. The number of participants employed on CE schemes nationally as at the end of December 2012 to end of June 2017 is as follows;

- 2012: 21,081
- 2013: 22,575
- 2014: 23,249
- 2015: 22,813
- 2016: 22,356
- 2017: 22,053

The number of people on CE fluctuates on an ongoing basis as vacancies arise and are filled on schemes. With reducing numbers on the Live Register, which is the main target cohort for CE, demand for places may also vary.

CE Sponsors advertise their vacancies free-of-charge on the Department's JobsIreland website - www.jobsireland.ie. Posting vacancies is a relatively simple process and a dedicated video tutorial is available on the site to assist sponsors. Anyone requiring further assistance can contact my Department's National Contact Centre by phone at Lo Call 1890 800 024 or (01) 248 1398, or by email at jobsireland@welfare.ie.

Jobseekers can also view CE vacancies online. Eligible candidates are referred to sponsors by case officers in the local Intreo office. My Department continues to refer candidates, so I would advise sponsors who have any recruitment concerns to contact their local Intreo office.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Implementation

1855. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will consider amending the criteria in order to enable those referred to Jobpath take up a place on a community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37914/17]

1857. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review Jobpath in view of the impact that it is having on community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37916/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1855 and 1857 together.

The aim of the JobPath service, which is provided for jobseekers only, is to assist them in finding sustainable full-time paid employment. Community Employment (CE) schemes provide part-time work experience and training opportunities in local communities as a stepping stone back to employment for people on a range of Social Welfare payments including those on long term unemployment payments, however they are not full-time jobs.

Customers who on the date of their referral to JobPath have a written offer with a start date within four weeks for CE or TÚS will be facilitated to take up the placement. Additionally, in a small number of exceptional cases, which are assessed on a case by case basis, my Department may facilitate a customer to move from one activation support to another.

Jobseekers who are already participating with the JobPath service will not be referred to CE as they can only participate with one activation scheme or service at a time. This allows the service providers' sufficient time to work with the participants in order to develop their skills and competencies to pursue suitable job opportunities which may result in sustainable employment and also to ensure that the best use is made of the available places on all activation supports. .

Those jobseekers that have completed their 52 week engagement with JobPath without finding suitable and sustainable employment are being referred back to their Intreo centres for an assessment by one of my Department's case officers. They may then apply for other activation supports such as CE, thus ensuring ongoing availability to all schemes.

My Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants and earlier this year the Government approved the implementation of a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE. The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Places

1856. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that community employment schemes are reporting that they are unable to fill places due to Jobpath; if so, the steps she will take to rectify

this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37915/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed job-seekers and those most distant from the labour market. These supports include Community Employment (CE) and JobPath.

Job Path aims to place people into full-time sustainable employment. The period of engagement with the service for any individual is typically 52 weeks. During that time they receive intensive individual support to help them overcome barriers to employment.

CE provides part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development as a stepping-stone back to employment, for people in receipt of a range of social welfare payments, including those on a long-term jobseeker's payment. While CE is a stepping stone back to employment, these positions are not full-time sustainable jobs. These schemes help to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market.

It should be noted that my Department recently implemented changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE. The main purpose of these changes is to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme. As part of these changes, the general qualifying age for CE for those on the live register has been reduced from 25 to 21 years. It is also now easier for previous participants who have exhausted their CE entitlement to requalify, as participation prior to the year 2007 will be disregarded. In addition those who have completed their year-long engagement with JobPath may, if eligible, apply for a CE vacancy.

If any CE scheme is experiencing particular difficulties, they should contact their local In-teo office for assistance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1857 answered with Question No. 1855.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1858. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal to a decision on disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37981/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 20th March 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Staff

1859. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [37991/17]

1860. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of staff deployed full time in her Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38007/17]

1920. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of vacancies in her Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38821/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1859, 1860 and 1920 together.

The Department's EU and International section, which includes a separate Brexit Unit, is led by an Assistant Secretary. The Brexit Unit has, at present, three additional staff assigned to it and reports directly to the Assistant Secretary. These are two Assistant Principals, one on a full-time basis and one on a four-day per week basis, and one Executive Officer on a four-day per week basis due to worksharing.

In addition to the salary costs for the three extra staff referenced above, an initial €10,000 was assigned to this unit under the Department's Administrative Budget to cover home travel and subsistence and the cost, where necessary, of facilitating the Department's Brexit consultative process with key stakeholders. Expenditure, to date, is €7,075.80. Additional expenditure of €4,134.37 has been incurred on airfares, and foreign travel and subsistence associated with Brexit, which is managed under central budgets. It is anticipated that total expenditure for the unit for 2017 will be in the region of €20,000.

Both staffing and funding requirements are being kept under continuous review.

More generally, the Management Board of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has been fully engaged with the social protection implications of the vote by the UK to leave the EU and, indeed, the earlier negotiations on the UK's relationship with the EU; a sub group of the Management Board is in place and the Board also receives regular updates on the key developments relating to Brexit.

Departmental Reports

1861. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the drafting, completion and publication of the report investigating bogus self employment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38035/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An interdepartmental working group, comprising officials from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners, has

been examining the emergence of new forms of employment arrangements, which may involve a degree of disguised employment. These include arrangements i) where an individual, who would otherwise be an employee, establishes a company to provide their services employment and ii) where an individual, who is dependent on and under the control of a single employer in the same manner as an employee, is classified as self-employed.

The working group sought the views of interested parties and stakeholders through a public consultation. The consultation received 23 submissions from interested parties, including employers, trade unions, professional bodies and individuals. The working group is preparing a report which will present the views of these organisations and individuals, together with an analysis of the issues arising. I understand that the working group is currently finalising the report.

I look forward to seeing the report and I will then consider, along with my colleague the Minister for Finance, what changes, if any, might be required.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1862. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38104/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 8th June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers have been received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 2nd August 2017 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

1863. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) regarding disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38105/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that an application from this gentleman for disability allowance (DA) was received by the department on 15 June 2017. The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

1864. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of community employment schemes that have an assistant supervisor in place as well as the supervisor; the number of persons that are on such schemes; the number of persons required for an assistant supervisor to be approved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38112/17]

1865. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of community employment schemes in the country; the number of persons on these schemes; the number of supervisors on these schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38113/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1864 and 1865 together.

The following table outlines the position in relation to the numbers requested by the Deputy as at end March 2017.

Total CE schemes	Total CE Participants	Total CE Supervisors	Total CE Assistant Supervisors
953	22,121	1,129	251*

* This figure represents 212 CE schemes which have both a supervisor and a least one assistant supervisor with a total of 7,285 participants.

My Department makes funding available for supervisory support however Community Employment (CE) sponsors are the legal employers of CE supervisors. The level of supervision required depends on the circumstances pertaining to each particular CE scheme. My Department will consider providing additional supervisory grant support where a CE scheme maintains an approval level of at least 26 or more participants, the Sponsor must submit a detailed job description for the additional supervisory tasks and each application is then examined on a case-by-case basis taking into account the relevant evidence and circumstances.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

1866. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount her Department's new name change will cost in rebranding of logos and the amount of stationary to be replaced; and the cost and what tender was submitted for such costings. [38119/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To minimise the cost implications of the change of the Department's name, the change to the Department's logo was done in-house. Also, the Department's current stationery including information leaflets and application forms will continue to be used and will only be replaced with newly branded items when the existing stocks are depleted. Hence, the Department has not incurred any additional cost from the re-design of its logo or from the changeover to new stationery.

As part of the change of Department name, a number of Department buildings will require a change of signage; however it is not proposed that any changes will be made to Intreo Centre

signage. The Department is currently reviewing the signage requirements of individual buildings, with a view to tendering for replacement signs shortly.

Question No. 1867 answered with Question No. 1831.

Question No. 1868 answered with Question No. 1827.

Treatment Benefit Scheme Eligibility

1869. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the case of a person (details supplied) regarding the treatment benefit scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38158/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Qualification for treatment benefit is based on satisfying certain PRSI conditions. The person concerned would need to have paid 260 PRSI contributions at either Class A, E, H, P or S, since first starting work, and also have 39 contributions paid or credited in the tax year on which the claim is based.

In this case, the person concerned does not qualify for the treatment benefit scheme as he does not have the required number of contributions paid.

However, if he has a Medical Card, he should contact his local HSE office, who will be able to advise him on his entitlement to hearing aids under their audiology scheme.

Public Services Card

1870. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if non State agencies or bodies have access to the information contained on the public services card; her plans to make this information available in the future to non State agencies and bodies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38190/17]

1936. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the data set held by her Department as the PSI; the manner in which this data is stored; if this data is stored solely by her department or by a third party on its behalf; the number of security audits that have taken place in the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39003/17]

1938. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the private companies which have access to data held on the public services card or wider PSI; the sanctions in place for breach or misuse of this data; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39008/17]

1939. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an assurance can be given in respect of the security and confidentiality of the data held on the public services card; the legal sanctions which apply breaches or misuse of this data; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39010/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1870, 1936, 1938 and 1939 together.

Section 263 of the Social Welfare Consolidation, Act (as amended) provides that:

The above data (apart from the issue number and expiry date of the PSC) is part of the Public Service Identity (PSI) dataset as set out in section 262 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended).

Section 262 also sets out how the sharing and use of the PSI data is restricted to public service bodies specified in law or their agents. Designation as a specified body requires primary legislation and as such can only be done by an Act of the Oireachtas. I am not aware of any plans to specify any additional bodies.

Section 262 provides that PSI data can only be used by a specified body for authenticating the identity of an individual with whom it has a transaction and in performing its public functions insofar as those functions relate to the person concerned. In addition, where a specified body collects any element of PSI data from a person, that information shall also be collected for the purpose of maintaining the person's public service identity. Additional cover is provided by the Data Protection Acts as amended, Subsection 1 c iii of Section 2A, where personal data may be processed providing "the processing is necessary for the performance of a function of the Government or a Minister of the Government".

The full PSI dataset consists of the surname; forename; date of birth; place of birth; sex; all former surnames (if any); all former surnames (if any) of his or her mother; address; nationality; date of death; certificate of death, where relevant; where required, a photograph of the person, except where the person is deceased; where required, the person's signature, except where the person is deceased; any other information as may be required for authentication purposes that is uniquely linked to or is capable of identifying that person; and any other information that may be prescribed which, in the opinion of the Minister, is relevant to and necessary for the allocation of a personal public service number.

The PSI data set is stored in enterprise class databases maintained in the Department's secure datacentres. The Department is committed to ensuring that customers' personal data is securely held and used only for business purposes. Access to the dataset is restricted to those members of staff who have a business need to reference the data and all accesses to the data are logged. All members of staff must, on an annual basis, sign undertakings that they have read, and will act in accordance with, data protection policies and guidelines. Failure to comply with these simple rules could leave them exposed to potentially serious allegations. Where such allegations are substantiated, staff could face disciplinary action (including possible dismissal) and potential legal action including possible claim for compensation for distress/damage caused to the customer. The Department ensures oversight in relation to data protection by keeping records of data accesses which are then subject to audit. Twenty eight security audits have been undertaken within the last five years, twenty two of these are completed, and six are in progress. Three Penetration tests, two Privacy Impact Assessments, and a Risk Assessment of the IS environment were also carried out during this timeframe.

The PSI data set is also stored by the Department of Public Enterprise and Reform as part of the Single Customer View. This system brings identity data together from a number of public bodies. The Single Customer View database is stored in a secure government data centre. Access to the data is tightly controlled and restricted to the government network. All data access is logged and regularly audited. The Secretary General of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is the Data Controller for the Single Customer View.

The PSC is produced in Ireland by an Irish-registered company called BCS. It was a condition of the award of contract that all data and related services provision and operation be provided on-site in Ireland and subject to the jurisdiction of the Irish courts. Once PSCs are personalised (i.e., the data is put on the card), the data used to so personalise them is not retained

by BCS but is destroyed as an automatic part of the personalisation process in accordance with advice provided by the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. In addition the systems used in the card production have been subjected to audit by external experts.

The Public Services Card itself has multiple protection mechanisms, all of the highest current international standards, to prevent and detect tampering with the physical card and its contents. As well as some hidden security features, there are visual measures such as the overall graphical design, branding, microprinting, the use of optical variable ink and a kinegram. In addition, a PSC and a card reader communicate with each other by cryptographic means. Only card readers specifically programmed to accept PSCs can undertake this functionality.

I hope this clarifies the matter for Deputies.

Question No. 1871 answered with Question No. 1827.

Living Alone Allowance

1872. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reviews or analysis that have been carried out to assess the adequacy or otherwise of the living alone allowance; if none have been carried out in recent years, her plans to conduct such a review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38195/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Primary weekly social welfare payments are intended to enable recipients to meet their basic day-to-day income needs. In addition to the living alone increase my Department pays out a range of other payments, both cash and non-cash on a weekly, monthly or less frequent basis. These payments are considered secondary in nature.

The living alone increase is an additional payment of €9.00, and it is not a payment in its own right, but rather it is a supplement to a social welfare payment made to people aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments, who are living alone, (the increase is not means tested payment). It is also available to people who are under 66 years of age, who are living alone and are in receipt of Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Incapacity Supplement and Blind Pension. There are currently 196,509 recipients of the living alone Increase.

The rate of primary and secondary payments to pensioners, and their adequacy, are considered in the context of the annual budgetary process. In doing so, the Government considers evidence from a wide range of sources, including agencies such as the CSO, and also research submitted by advocacy groups such as the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, who have a measure they call the “Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL)”. I am informed that the minimum level of income considered adequate as set out by that measure is €214.69 weekly for a single person of working age, and €216.38 weekly for a pensioner.

The combined payments made to recipients of the Living Alone Allowance – which includes their primary payments (such as Disability Allowance or a State pension non-contributory), the Living Alone Allowance, Fuel Allowance and Household benefits - result in weekly income that is above both of those thresholds. Currently, a recipient of disability allowance who lives alone receives the equivalent weekly income of approximately €221.30 per week, and a state pension non-contributory recipient living alone receives the equivalent of a weekly income support of some €255.30 per week, both of which are in excess of that standard.

While this means that payments are in excess of these adequacy thresholds found by the

Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, the ambition of the Government in this regard is more than adequacy, and where budgetary constraints can be overcome, the Government has striven to increase them to higher levels. The level of the Living Alone Allowance is reviewed on a periodic basis. Any increases are, however, subject to the normal budgetary constraints.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Living Alone Allowance

1873. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of males and females respectively in receipt of the living alone allowance for each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38196/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested (where available) by the Deputy is detailed in the table.

Recipients of Living Alone Allowances by Scheme and Gender at 31 December in each of the years 2012 to 2016			
Disability Allowance			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2012	14,613	8,597	23,210
2013	15,079	8,927	24,006
2014	15,655	9,323	24,978
2015	16,542	9,967	26,509
2016	17,197	10,487	27,684
Invalidity Pension			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2012	4,931	4,088	9,019
2013	5,069	4,279	9,348
2014	4,995	4,374	9,369
2015	4,950	4,496	9,446
2016	4,940	4,563	9,503

Recipients of Living Alone Allowances by Scheme and Gender at 31 December in each of the years 2012 to 2016			
State Pension (Non-Contributory) Pension			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2012	11,983	20,871	32,854
2013	12,193	20,776	32,969
2014	12,384	20,524	32,908
2015	12,794	20,503	33,297
2016	13,107	20,284	33,391
State Pension (Contributory)			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2012	31,316	29,121	60,437

2013	32,326	29,908	62,234
2014	33,878	31,001	64,879
2015	35,733	32,416	68,149
2016	37,240	33,516	70,756
Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contribu- tory Pension			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2012	4,098	44,695	48,793
2013	4,347	45,250	49,597
2014	4,582	45,783	50,365
2015	4,908	46,836	51,744
2016	5,147	47,475	52,622

Supreme Court Rulings

1874. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to introduce legislation or amend legislation in view of a recent Supreme Court case challenging the constitutionality of a law stopping payment of the contributory old age pension to prisoners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38197/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department has noted the recent judgment of the Supreme Court case referred to by the Deputy.

That judgment is currently being evaluated by my officials in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General and officials of other Departments.

Accordingly, as I'm sure the Deputy can appreciate, I am not yet in a position to discuss possible legislative amendments or otherwise pending policy and legal advice and consideration of the issues further by Government.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

1875. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to establish a mandatory pension scheme with auto-enrolment; the consultations that have taken place to date on such a scheme; when a scheme may become operational; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38202/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rate of supplementary pension coverage in Ireland is 47% of the working population and this reduces to 35% when the private sector is considered in isolation. Whilst the State pension provides a reasonable basic level of income and guards against poverty in retirement, if measures are not taken to address this low rate of supplementary coverage, many future retirees will experience unwanted reductions in living standards when they reach retirement.

I intend to make pension reform a priority in my term as Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. To this end, I can confirm my intention to publish and commence in the

coming months the implementation of a number of measures for the reform of pensions. In addition to a range of other long term reform measures, these measures will detail proposals and timelines for a transition from the current and purely voluntary supplementary pension system to one which will, subject to certain parameters, automatically enrol employees into a quality assured retirement savings system. This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement. It will increase the wellbeing, financial security and independence of future retirees.

In order to facilitate input from those with an interest in this area and to utilise the range of existing expertise, approximately 35 organisations and representative bodies were previously invited to outline their views on the potential parameters of an auto enrolment system. Officials in my Department subsequently met with many of these sectoral interests to discuss the submissions received and allow further articulation of views. Additionally, a number of consumer focus groups have been held to establish attitudes towards mandatory and auto enrolment retirement savings systems.

In addition to the above, consultations have also taken place with international/Irish subject matter experts to inform the deliberative process. This includes experts from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and the OECD.

A review of international auto enrolment retirement systems has confirmed that success is dependent on well tested design and securing member trust. To this end, further detailed evidence building and consultation will be undertaken to inform fundamental choices which are required regarding the preferred operational structure and organisational governance for a new system as well as design elements such contribution levels, financial incentives and target membership. Correctly positioning/designing each of these will be critical to the success of any system.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1876. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38263/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 28 April 2017.

Additional information was requested from the person concerned on 22 June 2017. Following receipt of this information it was determined that the matter should be referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Carer's Allowance Applications

1877. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38264/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My department received an application for Carer's Allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 22 May 2017.

One of the qualifying conditions is that the means of the person concerned must be less than the statutory limit.

Following an investigation it was determined that the means of the person concerned were not less than the statutory limit and that she was therefore not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 4 September 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1878. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal of a refusal to grant carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38265/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

1879. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal of a refusal to grant carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38266/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 13 February 2017.

CA is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that

adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

It has been decided that this condition has not been satisfied. It has also been decided that although the person concerned is providing a certain amount of care, the level provided is not considered to be full-time.

The person concerned was notified on 12 July 2017 of this decision, the reasons for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application. Following this review the decision remained unchanged.

The person concerned was notified on 7 September 2017 of the outcome of the review, the reasons for it and of her right of appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1880. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38267/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of carer's allowance (CA) for one care recipient since 23 November 2006.

My department received an application for CA for a 2nd care recipient on the 12 July 2017.

The application is currently being examined and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Carer's Allowance Applications

1881. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38273/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is a condition for receipt of Carer's Benefit (CARB) that the person being cared for must have a disability whose effect is that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself.

The care recipient underwent a total knee replacement in February 2017 and CARB was initially awarded for a period of 3 months up to 9 August 2017, as it was decided that he required full-time care for that period.

Before the end of this 3 month period, the carer submitted further evidence in support of her

claim for continued payment. This evidence was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 30 August 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy .

Social Welfare Appeals

1882. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38275/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 18th July 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

1883. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38276/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The department has no record of an application for disability allowance having been made by this gentleman. If the person in concerned wishes to make an application, he should fully complete and submit applications form (DA1) so that his eligibility may be determined.

If he has submitted an application for DA in the last few days, there is no need to reapply and the department will be in touch with him in due course.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

1884. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's benefit application by a person (details supplied). [38286/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An

application for carer's benefit was received from the person concerned on 6 July 2017.

The application was awarded to the person concerned on 6 September 2017, with effect from 20 July 2017 when her carer's leave commenced and the first payment will issue to the her nominated bank account on 14 September 2017.

Arrears of benefit due from 20 July 2017 to 13 September 2017 will also issue to her bank on 14 September 2017.

The person concerned was notified of the decision on 6 September 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1885. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38287/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1886. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38290/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 26 June 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Rates

1887. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost to the Exchequer of a proposal (details supplied) in tabular form. [38310/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

cost of adjusting the class A PRSI employer's rate for those earning less than €380 per week is contained in the table below.

New Rate	Cost
8.00%	€19.5m
7.75%	€28.7m
7.50%	€37.9m
7.25%	€47.1m
7.00%	€56.3m
6.75%	€65.5m
6.50%	€74.7m
6.25%	€83.9m
6.00%	€93.1m
5.75%	€102.3m
5.50%	€111.4m
5.25%	€120.6m
5.00%	€129.8m
4.75%	€139.0m
4.50%	€148.2m
4.25%	€157.4m
4.00%	€166.6m

These estimates are based on the latest available data and reflect macro-economic indicators for 2018. It should be noted that the estimates do not take into account any possible changes in employer behaviour arising from the rate changes.

Disability Allowance Data

1888. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of disability allowance applications received on a monthly basis by county in 2016 and for the first six months of 2017; the number of these applications that were successful, unsuccessful or returned for further information; the number of applications that were unsuccessful which were granted on the second application or on appeal; the number of the persons who met a doctor on assessment of their first application and in cases in which an appeal was submitted or a second application submitted; the number who met a doctor, for the same period in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38342/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): To qualify for disability allowance (DA), a person must be substantially restricted in undertaking suitable employment, be aged between 16 and 65, satisfy a means test and be habitually resident in the state. An application for DA may be disallowed on the grounds that one or more of the conditions set out above are not satisfied.

Assessments of medical eligibility for DA are based on medical reports and other evidence furnished by the applicant and the applicant's treating physician. Medical eligibility for DA is not normally assessed by way of an in-person assessment. The Department's Medical Assessor (MA) reviews the medical evidence provided in support of the application and expresses an opinion based on their findings. The MA does not dispute the existence of the certified cause of incapacity, but rather assesses the degree to which the loss of function in work-related activities, resulting from disease or injury, affects the person's ability to perform either their own job or

alternative types of work. The MA presents their opinion from the assessment for the guidance of the Deciding Officers (DO) in the DA scheme area. In certain cases, where warranted, the MA can recommend that the person undergo an in-person assessment.

From January 2016 to end of June 2017, there were no in-person medical assessments completed for persons applying for DA.

It is not possible to provide all of the data requested in the question. The following table shows the number of DA applications that were received, awarded and disallowed from the start of January 2016 to the end of June 2017. It is not possible to identify those cases where further information was requested before a decision could be made on entitlement or those that were deemed eligible for DA on review by a DO or Appeals Officer (AO). These data are not collated by county.

Disability Allowance	Received		Awarded*		Disallowed	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
January	1,634	1,577	1,146	1,385	1,568	1,371
February	1,936	2,179	1,053	1,469	1,343	958
March	2,155	2,507	1,165	1,552	935	1,319
April	1,986	1,840	1,458	1,065	770	1,034
May	1,941	2,490	1,349	1,721	1,019	1,198
June	2,203	766	1,490	1,900	1,009	1,051
July	1,837		1,546		1,226	
August	2,126		1,475		1,010	
September	1,973		1,843		960	
October	2,155		1,632		1,028	
November	2,471		1,483		1,546	
December	1,387		1,029		578	

*Data in relation to awarded cases include cases in the disallowed category which were subsequently awarded following a review or a successful appeal.

The following tables show DA recipients per county per month from January 2016 to June 2017.

2016	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Carlow	1,919	1,921	1,922	1,934	1,943	1,960	1,965	1,982	1,994	2,008	2,046	2,061
Cavan	1,693	1,707	1,704	1,706	1,715	1,724	1,732	1,741	1,738	1,752	1,761	1,774
Clare	2,908	2,914	2,927	2,945	2,966	2,972	2,981	2,008	3,007	3,028	3,044	3,053
Cork	14,621	14,660	14,716	14,811	14,889	14,987	15,064	15,170	15,279	15,377	15,457	15,553
Donegal	5,002	5,012	5,020	5,055	5,056	5,086	5,106	5,148	5,143	5,188	4,194	5,228
Dublin	29,419	29,481	29,570	29,712	29,855	29,969	30,015	30,159	30,403	30,624	31,739	30,809
Galway	6,837	6,860	6,878	6,911	6,941	6,958	6,982	7,015	7,053	7,096	7,113	7,151
Kerry	4,491	4,520	4,541	4,554	4,568	4,605	4,626	4,658	4,699	4,733	4,752	4,755
Kildare	4,042	4,061	4,071	4,106	4,157	4,184	4,205	4,235	4,281	4,311	4,308	4,341
Kilkenny	2,256	2,268	2,268	2,278	2,289	2,297	2,311	2,329	2,342	2,373	2,386	2,396
Laois	2,070	2,081	2,095	2,099	2,093	2,103	2,100	2,115	2,137	2,146	2,164	2,174
Leitrim	838	839	836	846	849	860	864	876	887	898	904	904
Limerick	6,206	6,209	6,240	6,262	6,288	6,312	6,362	6,368	6,417	6,500	6,534	6,574
Longford	1,374	1,380	1,385	1,393	1,408	1,420	1,431	1,440	1,446	1,461	1,462	1,472
Louth	3,205	3,211	3,228	3,245	3,268	3,288	3,306	3,331	3,374	3,418	3,452	3,472
Mayo	3,830	3,835	3,843	3,851	3,860	3,867	3,860	3,871	3,891	3,900	3,904	3,920

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Meath	3,120	3,112	3,123	3,148	3,159	3,181	3,198	3,213	3,257	3,283	3,305	3,303
Monaghan	1,391	1,398	1,399	1,404	1,406	1,413	1,415	1,424	1,440	1,445	1,455	1,455
Offaly	2,079	2,086	2,084	2,111	2,138	2,139	2,157	2,178	2,216	2,245	2,235	2,262
Roscommon	1,668	1,670	1,683	1,695	1,706	1,713	1,716	1,729	1,731	1,744	1,756	1,760
Sligo	1,948	1,958	1,963	1,970	1,992	2,000	2,012	2,014	2,006	2,021	2,027	2,042
Tipperary	5,286	5,285	5,340	5,371	5,401	5,421	5,427	5,440	5,454	5,492	5,529	5,554
Waterford	3,315	3,330	3,346	3,369	3,396	3,418	3,444	3,462	3,510	3,533	3,539	3,554
Westmeath	2,416	2,419	2,426	2,444	2,442	2,459	2,468	2,486	2,520	2,553	2,582	2,607
Wexford	4,340	4,360	4,377	4,416	4,441	4,464	4,481	4,512	4,550	4,588	4,643	4,667
Wicklow	3,141	3,150	3,156	3,182	3,185	3,194	3,221	3,247	3,297	3,323	3,344	3,357
Not Recorded	7	9	7	8	5	6	4	4	-	6	5	5

2017	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June
Carlow	2,060	2,075	2,089	2,098	2,107	2,125
Cavan	1,789	1,801	1,811	1,822	1,837	1,864
Clare	3,064	3,093	3,103	3,100	3,124	3,143
Cork	15,583	15,704	15,783	15,790	15,907	16,024
Donegal	5,248	5,283	5,305	5,341	5,365	5,401
Dublin	30,886	31,072	31,235	31,295	31,450	31,661
Galway	7,135	7,184	7,228	7,240	7,291	7,347
Kerry	4,771	4,817	4,841	4,841	4,867	4,914
Kildare	4,365	4,392	4,413	4,428	4,466	4,517
Kilkenny	2,401	2,420	2,435	2,446	2,461	2,477
Laois	2,180	2,197	2,204	2,220	2,240	2,268
Leitrim	903	919	922	927	941	949
Limerick	6,596	6,612	6,667	6,697	6,720	6,782
Longford	1,473	1,482	1,504	1,513	1,525	1,543
Louth	3,492	3,516	3,558	3,576	3,599	3,662
Mayo	3,927	3,942	3,965	3,966	3,984	4,008
Meath	3,326	3,352	3,374	3,392	3,412	3,459
Monaghan	1,450	1,462	1,470	1,477	1,476	1,471
Offaly	2,280	2,292	2,313	2,317	2,343	2,386
Roscommon	1,767	1,779	1,779	1,785	1,810	1,834
Sligo	2,050	2,066	2,065	2,067	2,068	2,094
Tipperary	5,569	5,600	5,627	5,639	5,676	5,717
Waterford	3,568	3,574	3,596	3,600	3,621	3,647
Westmeath	2,621	2,618	2,645	2,648	2,666	2,712
Wexford	4,690	4,714	4,753	4,742	4,772	4,831
Wicklow	3,370	3,385	3,401	3,411	3,423	3,451
Not Recorded	3	4	4	4	4	3

The following table shows the number of DA appeals allowed, partially allowed and disallowed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office in 2016 and the first six months of 2017.

Year	Appeal Allowed	Appeal disallowed	Appeal Partially Allowed
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2016	2,830	1,367	88
2017	1,186	728	46

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Labour Court Recommendations

1889. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether Labour Court recommendations should be adhered to; and the circumstances in which in her view it is appropriate that they be ignored. [38343/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Labour Court is an independent workplace dispute resolution body providing a comprehensive service for the resolution of disputes concerning industrial relations and employment rights. The Labour Court is not a court of law. The operation of the Court and its business is a matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

State Bodies Data

1890. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the annual percentage of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies staff under the remit of her Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38362/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are two non-commercial State sponsored bodies working under the aegis of this Department. These are the Citizens Information Board and the Pensions Authority. The following tables provide the percentage of female staff working in both of these agencies from 2010 to date.

% Female staff in the Pensions Authority at 31 December

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (at 1 September)
64%	63%	67%	68%	64%	70%	70%	69%

% Female staff in the Citizens Information Board at 31 December

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 to date
67%	67%	67%	67%	67%	67%	67%	64%

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

1891. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue regarding a domiciliary care allowance for persons (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38369/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing

of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA was received in respect of this child on the 24th May 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date of when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in April and May 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff Data

1892. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the annual percentage of public service staff who were women under the remit of her Department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38385/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following table provides a breakdown of the percentage of female permanent staff employed by this Department from 2010 to end July 2017.

Year	Female FTE %
2010	67
2011	68
2012	68
2013	69
2014	69
2015	69
2016	68
End July 2017	68

Training Support Grant

1893. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the technical employment support grant is paid by SOLAS or by the service provider to persons on JobPath (details supplied). [38449/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Training Support Grant (TSG) previously known as the Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG) is funded by my department

TSG is designed to facilitate quick access to short-term training where this cannot be provided by a state provider within a reasonable time or where an intervention is identified that can support individual jobseekers to access work opportunities. The scheme is activation focused and the jobseeker is required to provide reasonable evidence of need, in the form of a potential job offer or a requirement to maintain or achieve accreditation.

Although JobPath participants do not have access to the Training Support Grant (TSG) provided by the Department while participating on the JobPath service, JobPath providers will, on a case by case basis, provide similar funding and arrange and pay for specific skills training if required for particular types of work and a participant has an offer of employment on completion of that training.

JobPath providers arrange for the delivery of a broad range of education and training courses with a particular and strong focus on upskilling the long term unemployed. JobPath providers have their own discretionary funds available to pay for these training courses. Some of these courses are provided in-house while others are provided by specialist training providers including the Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1894. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision on a carer's allowance will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38547/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 7 December 2016. It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have a such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and it was decided that it did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied. The person concerned was notified on 19 June 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support.

The outcome of this review is that the application was awarded to the person concerned on 6 September 2017, with effect from 8 December 2016, and the first payment will issue to her nominated bank account on 14 September 2017.

Arrears of allowance due from 8 December 2016 to 13 September 2017 have also issued.

The person concerned was notified on 6 September 2017 of this revised decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card

1895. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if social protection payments to persons who refused to take up or present a public services card are accruing; if their backdated payments will be paid to them; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [38549/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In 2005, the Government approved a rules based standard for establishing and authenticating an individual's identity for the purposes of access to public services. This standard is known as the Standard Authentication Framework environment – or SAFE. A person who successfully completes a SAFE 2 registration process (i.e., verifies their identity to a substantial level of assurance) is issued with a Public Services Card (PSC).

In the case of the Department of Social Protection's own services, the legislation governing identity verification for existing claimants is set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended, *viz.*

- Section 247C(1) of the Act provides that the Minister may require any person receiving a benefit to satisfy the Minister as to his or her identity;

- Section 247C(2) of the Act specifies the consequences of failure to satisfy the Minister in relation to identity as required, specifically that a person shall be disqualified from receiving a benefit;

- Section 247C(3) of the Act specifies the manner in which the Minister may be so satisfied; in effect, this Section describes the process for registering a person's identity - this is the SAFE 2 Process.

In other words, this legislation requires a person to satisfy the Minister as to their identity and allows disqualification from receipt of a benefit in the event that it is not done. It is not possible for a person to satisfy the Minister as to his or her identity without being SAFE 2 registered.

The Department makes every effort to facilitate a person undertaking a SAFE 2 registration. Firstly, customers are invited to a scheduled registration appointment. The Department also issues reminder letters to customers, as required. Customers may book a different time/date to suit them, either online via www.mywelfare.ie, by contacting the Department's offices, or by walking in to ask for the next available appointment. The process takes about 15 minutes to complete, once all required documents are presented. If a person is unable to attend an appointment due to challenges relating to age, mobility or disability, the Department will make alternative arrangements. These can include, where appropriate, postal registration methods or mobile SAFE registration facilities at group and community settings or, in exceptional circumstances, individually. In this context, I want to make it clear that customers who face bona fide challenges to in-person attendance will not be disadvantaged, in terms of access to payments and/or availing of Free Travel entitlements.

The Department does not collect data on the number of individuals who currently, or who, at any point in time, have had a payment stopped by reason of failing to complete the SAFE 2 registration process. This data is fluid in nature. For example, a considerable number of customers who have a payment or entitlement suspended subsequently decide to complete the SAFE2 process and have their payment or entitlement reinstated and backdated to the date of suspension. It should be noted that of the remainder, a considerable portion do not make any contact with the Department at all. The decision to stop a payment is never made lightly. However, where a customer does not "satisfy the Minister in relation to identity" as per the legislative requirements, a payment can be disqualified. In advance of any such disqualification, the Department makes every effort to engage with the customer to explain the legislative basis for the SAFE 2 registration process and the consequences of potential disqualification. Where a payment has been disqualified and the customer subsequently successfully completes the SAFE 2 registra-

tion process, their payment will be reinstated by the Department (assuming they continue to meet all qualifying criteria for that payment) from the date of compliance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1896 answered with Question No. 1827.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Eligibility

1897. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason foster parents are not entitled to claim the back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance; if there are supports available to them from her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38556/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the costs of clothing and footwear when children start or return to school each autumn. The Government has provided €47.4 million for the scheme in 2017.

Foster care allowances are payable by the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, which falls under the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This allowance is provided in order to allow foster carers to meet the child's daily living needs including the cost of clothing and footwear and school related items. Accordingly, the back to school clothing and footwear allowance is not payable in respect of foster children.

It is the case that my Department provides a number of supports for foster carers subject to satisfying the usual conditions for receipt of these payments. These include:

- Monthly child benefit in respect of the foster child,
- A weekly increase - €29.80 - for a qualified child (which can include a foster child) where the foster parent or his or her spouse/partner is in receipt of a weekly income support from my Department,
- The Back to Work Family Dividend where the foster parent transitions from eligible social welfare payments into employment and
- Family Income Supplement where the foster child is a qualified child for the purposes of the scheme and the foster family qualify for a payment.

In addition, social welfare legislation provides that foster care allowances paid by Tusla are not taken into account in assessing the means of any weekly social assistance payments.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1898. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for an invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38561/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are perma-

nently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The gentleman concerned was refused IP on the grounds that he is working a farm of land. He was notified on the 30 June 2017 of this decision, the reasons for it and of his right of review and appeal. Previous representations on this matter from the Deputy were treated as a request for a review from the gentleman in question. Following a review of all the information available, the Deciding Officer (DO) is now satisfied that the gentleman concerned is not working and that medical conditions for the scheme are satisfied.

On the 08 September 2017, the gentleman in question was asked to provide further information relevant to his application. Upon receipt of that information, the IP claim will be finalised and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

1899. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38564/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned has been referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Payments

1900. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a disability allowance payment will issue to a person (details supplied); the date the payment was awarded; the amount awarded and due; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38566/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 9 November 2016. The first payment will be made by her chosen payment method on 27 September 2017.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments or in respect of outstanding overpayments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1901 answered with Question No. 1831.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

1902. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of welfare recipients who have been subject to sanctions for non-engagement in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38568/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Penalty rates were introduced as a means of encouraging jobseekers to engage with activation measures and co-operate with efforts of the Department to assist them in securing employment. The Department is committed, under Pathways to Work, to incentivise the take-up of activation opportunities, including implementing sanctions for failure to engage.

The legislation underpinning the application of penalty rates is provided for in Social Welfare legislation. The application of the penalty provisions can only be applied in specific circumstances and the decision to impose a penalty can only be made by a Deciding Officer of the Department. If dissatisfied with that decision it is open to the Jobseeker to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Details of the numbers of penalty rates applied in the specific years up August 2017, as sought by the Deputy, can be found in the table.

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total:
PR	359	1,519	3,395	5,325	6,743	10,867	10,574	38,782

Exceptional Needs Payment Data

1903. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who have applied for an exceptional needs payment in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number who have been awarded and refused this payment, respectively; the expenditure on this payment in those years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38569/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, my Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional needs payments (ENPs) and urgent needs payments (UNPs) in 2017.

There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. The ENP scheme is demand led and payments are made at the discretion of the officers administering the scheme taking into account the requirements of the legislation and all the relevant circumstances of the case in order to ensure that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

Statistics are maintained relating to payments under the ENP scheme, however they are not maintained on the number of applications or the outcome of those applications. Details of the number of payments and expenditure under the ENP and UNP schemes for 2012 to 2017 are set out in the following tabular statement.

Any persons who consider that they have an entitlement to an ENP should contact my Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Table 1: Number of Exceptional Needs Payments and Exchequer Outturn made by year

Year	Number of Payments	Outturn (million)
2012	197,500	€52.70
2013	132,990	€35.70
2014	107,139	€30.10
2015	101,603	€31.00
2016	100,107	€32.20*
2017	58,166	€23.80 (End August)

*2016 Outturn is provisional

Departmental Reports

1904. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the report that was to be prepared by her Department within three months of the passing of the Social Welfare Act 2016 on the financial and social effects of amendments to the one-parent family payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38570/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On foot of the legislative commitment contained in the Social Welfare Act 2016 to carry out an independent report on the amendments to the one parent family payment, and following a tendering process, Indecon Economic Consultants were selected and commenced work on the report in April of this year.

I would like to clarify for the Deputy that this report was not due to be completed within 3 months of the enactment of the Social Welfare Bill as he has indicated in the question. The legislation states that the Minister shall cause to have the report prepared within 3 months and completed within 9 months of the enactment of the Bill. My Department issued a Request for Tenders within the initial 3 month timeframe.

The contract requires Indecon to examine the financial, social, poverty and welfare dependency impacts of the changes to the OFP scheme that were introduced since January 2012. To achieve this Indecon must carry out a detailed quantitative and econometric analysis of the Department’s data on affected lone parents, and carry out a qualitative analysis that includes issuing a survey to 34,000 lone parents and collating those results.

The timeframe for the review was always very ambitious given the scale and complexity of the issues to be covered in the review. However, it is expected that the report will be available within the coming weeks.

Poverty Data

1905. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rate of severe material deprivation for lone parents here; the way in which this compares with the EUROSTAT average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38571/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The latest Eurostat European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions data show that the severe material deprivation rate for lone parent households was 22.6% in Ireland in 2015. This is the

second successive year the rate reduced – representing a 9.7 percentage point reduction on the 2013 rate of 32.3%. The Irish rate compares to the EU average of 17.1% in 2015 (see Table 1).

The full impact of the recovery is not reflected in these figures, which relate to 2015. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. Unemployment has fallen from 9.4% in mid-2015 to 6.3% now. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall.

With these improvements, the Government was in a position to introduce a range of welfare increases from 2016 onwards. This includes a package of measures to support lone parents, encouraging them into the workplace and into education and helping to reduce their childcare costs. In Budget 2017 all lone parents on the one-parent family payment, the jobseeker’s transitional payment and jobseeker’s allowance have benefited from the €5 increase in the weekly rates of payment from March. A new €500 annual Cost of Education Allowance will be made available to Back to Education Allowance participants with children from the academic year starting this September. In addition, the income disregards for the one-parent family payment and the jobseeker’s transitional payment increased by €20 from January, from €90 to €110 per week, reversing in part previous reductions, to encourage one parent families to stay in, and return to, work.

The Department of Social Protection’s social impact assessment of Budget 2017 showed that average household incomes increase by 1%. Non-earning lone parents were the biggest beneficiary of Budget 2017 with gains of 4.5%. Working lone parents also experienced above average gains at almost 1.2%.

The improvement in the economy, together with the welfare measures referred to, are likely to have supported a further reduction in severe material deprivation in the period since 2015. This improvement is expected to continue with further rises in incomes and living standards.

Table 1: Severe Material Deprivation rate in lone parent households 2010 to 2015

Lone Parents Households	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ireland	12.8%	23.3%	27.4%	32.3%	25.1%	22.6%
EU-28	17.1%	18.4%	21.5%	20.7%	19.2%	17.1%

Source: Eurostat EU-SILC, various years. Extracted 17/05/2017.

Poverty Data

1906. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rate of severe material deprivation for those not at work due to an illness or disability; the way in which this compares with the EUROSTAT average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38572/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Eurostat does not report on consistent poverty, at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation measures based on the principal economic status “unable to work due to disability or illness”. However, in the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), disability is based on the concept of global activity limitation. This is defined as a “limitation in activities people usu-

ally do because of health problems for at least the past six months” but it does not differentiate between those in employment and those not in employment.

The latest EU-SILC data available shows that the severe material deprivation rate for people (aged 16 years and over) who are limited in their normal activities due to a health problem was 14.9% in Ireland in 2015, as compared to the EU average of 11.3%.

The full impact of the recovery is not reflected in these figures, which relate to 2015. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. Unemployment has fallen from 9.4% in mid-2015 to 6.3% now. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall.

With these improvements, the Government has been in a position to introduce a range of welfare increases from 2016 onwards. This includes a package of measures to support the employment opportunities for people with a disability.

My Department provides a range of specific income, activation and employment supports for people with a disability. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities adopts a cross-government approach that brings together various measures, to be taken by different Departments and State agencies, in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on the employment of people with disabilities. These priorities are incorporated into the Pathways to Work Strategy and this ensures that there is an integrated focus on supports that enable people with disabilities to participate in employment where they have the capacity to do so.

The partial capacity benefit scheme enables recipients of invalidity pension and illness benefit to take-up employment, on a voluntary basis, while continuing to receive income support. The Department manages a supported employment service (EmployAbility) which provides a dedicated job-coaching service for people with disabilities. Intreo services are also available to provide employment support services for people with disabilities who wish to engage with the service on a voluntary basis. There is also a focus on supports available to employers who employ people with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Workplace Equipment Adaption Grant Scheme.

The Department of Social Protection’s social impact assessment of Budget 2017 showed that average household incomes increase by 1%.

The improvement in the economy, together with the welfare measures referred to, are likely to have supported a further reduction in severe material deprivation in the period since 2015, including for people with disabilities. This improvement is expected to continue with further forecast rises in employment, incomes and living standards.

Social Welfare Payments Waiting Times

1907. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average waiting times for decisions on all social welfare payments from her Department; the number of persons awaiting decisions for all social welfare payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38573/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information (where available) requested by the Deputy is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

Number of claims Pending and Average time to Award by scheme at 31 August 2017

Schemes	Pending	Average time to award (weeks)
Jobseeker's Benefit	1,927	1
Jobseeker's Allowance	6,235	2
One-Parent Family Payment	1,092	6
State Pension Contributory (Dom)	2,769	5
Widow, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partners Contributory Pension	283	1
Widowed Parent Grant	15	1
State Pension Non-Contributory	2,229	14
Household Benefits	1,195	1
Free Travel	10	3
Domiciliary Care Allowance	3,065	19
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	2,922	1
Child Benefit (Domestic)	1,335	4
Child Benefit (EU Regulation)	914	39
Child Benefit (Over 16)	3602	4
Child Benefit (Additional Child)	26	1
Treatment Benefit	37,791	6
Maternity Benefit	2,332	6
Paternity Benefit	191	6
Family Income Supplement	3,004	3
Carer's Allowance*	4,847	14
Carer's Benefit	704	10
Disability Allowance	5,162	10
Invalidity Pension	1,408	6
Illness Benefit	2,133	1
Occupational Injury Benefit	172	1

* End of July figures

Jobseeker's Payments

1908. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of jobseeker's payments in the Dublin South-West constituency, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38578/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department cannot at present reliably identify claimant addresses by constituency boundaries. However the following table shows jobseeker payment recipients in Dublin broken down by payment type and claimant's Intreo Office.

Recipients of a jobseekers payment in Dublin INTREO offices 31 August 2017

Office	Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Jobseeker's Credits Only	Total
Balbriggan	2,359	575	412	3,346
Ballyfermot	2,094	229	127	2,450
Ballymun	1,974	185	33	2,192
Bishops Square	4,123	836	836	5,795
Blanchardstown	4,261	1,033	839	6,133
Clondalkin	4,084	670	426	5,180
Coolock	2,326	474	440	3,240
Cork Street	4,377	681	282	5,340
Dun Laoghaire	2,508	1,105	1,181	4,794
Finglas	3,760	711	489	4,960
Kilbarrack	2,234	686	693	3,613
Kings Inn	3,192	610	516	4,318
Navan Road	2,894	430	330	3,654
Nutgrove	1,644	770	976	3,390
Swords	1,582	657	502	2,741
Tallaght	6,596	926	631	8,153
Total	50,008	10,578	8,713	69,299

Social Insurance Yield

1909. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated additional revenue that would be generated if the higher rate of PRSI of 10.75% was increased to 12.75% for persons earning over €110,000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38651/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The estimated additional revenue that would be generated if the higher rate of PRSI of 10.75% was increased to 12.75% for persons earning over €110,000 is €119m.

This estimate is based on the latest available data and reflects macro-economic indicators for 2018 only. It should be noted that the estimates do not take possible changes in behaviour arising from increasing the rates of contribution into account.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1910. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38674/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 6 June 2017 in respect of two care recipients.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the person being cared for must have such disability that they require full-time care and attention.

This is defined as requiring from another person, continual supervision and frequent assistance throughout the day in connection with normal bodily functions or continuous supervision in order to avoid danger to him or herself and likely to require that level of care for at least twelve months.

The evidence submitted in support of these applications was examined and the deciding officer decided that this evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied for either care recipient.

The person concerned was notified on 8 September 2017 of these decisions, the reasons for them and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

1911. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38675/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on the 4 August 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

1912. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal of a decision to refuse an invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38683/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Issues

1913. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38693/17]

1914. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38709/17]

1915. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit, including threats and their prioritisation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38725/17]

1916. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the scenario planning that has been conducted by her Department for Brexit. [38741/17]

1917. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38757/17]

1918. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38773/17]

1919. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38805/17]

1921. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38837/17]

1923. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the Brexit-related research currently being undertaken by her Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38885/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1913 to 1919, inclusive, 1921 and 1923 together.

The comprehensive document "Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach" published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;

- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;

- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;

- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;

- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

The Government's objective is to ensure that the reciprocity of civic rights and social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain under the Common Travel Area (CTA), are safeguarded and maintained.

In that regard and in relation to the areas under my remit, the key area of concern is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance (which includes pensions) and social assistance (means tested schemes linked to residency rights) and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland.

As with all EU Member States, Ireland and the UK are part of a system of social security coordination that sets down common rules to protect the social security rights of people moving within Europe. These rules are provided for in very detailed Regulations [883/2004 and 987/2009]. They do not replace national systems with a single European one but, rather, provide a bridge between national systems to ensure social security protection for people when moving within Europe – that is, the current EU28, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. This coordination prevents, for example, a person being left without protection or having double-coverage in a cross-border situation.

The following table details the national legislation to which the EU rules on social security coordination apply and the Irish benefits classified under each heading:

Schemes	Classification of Irish social welfare schemes-benefits
Family Benefits	Child Benefit, Domiciliary Care Allowance, Family Income Supplement, Back to Work Family Dividend, One-Parent Family Payment and Guardian's Payment [non-contributory]
Unemployment Benefits	Jobseeker's Benefit
Old Age and Survivors Benefits	State Pension [Contributory], Widow/er's and Surviving Civil Partner's [Contributory] Pension, Guardian's Payment [Contributory]
Invalidity Benefits	Invalidity Pension, Partial Capacity Benefit
Sickness and Maternity Benefits	Illness Benefit, Maternity Benefit, Health and Safety Benefit, Adoptive Benefit, Carer's Benefit, Treatment Benefit
Benefits in respect of accidents at work and occupational diseases	Incapacity Supplement, Constant Care Allowance
Applicable Social Security Legislation – posted workers	For example, liability for social security contributions where a person - Has been posted from Ireland to the UK or vice versa;- Is concurrently employed or self-employed in Ireland and the UK

The Department is continuing an assessment of the implications of Brexit on these areas on a scheme-by-scheme, client and service provision basis. This is part of ongoing Brexit analysis and scenario planning for input into larger Government deliberative processes and it is considered that all of these areas merit equal prioritisation as they fundamentally relate to the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of our citizens.

Question No. 1920 answered with Question No. 1859.

Question No. 1921 answered with Question No. 1913.

Brexit Issues

1922. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the membership and role of all Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups working with her Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38853/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department held an All-Island Sectoral Dialogue on 16 February last, hosted by my predecessor. The theme of this stakeholder engagement event was 'Brexit: implications for social welfare pensions, social insurance and social welfare rights-entitlements'. The event was attended by some 40 people from civil society and the Department's citizen representative groups, business, trade unions and academia. A list of the organisations represented at the dialogue is below in a tabular statement. A further such stakeholder event will held in due course.

The Department also holds regular focus group meetings with its client representative groups. Most recently, on 11th July, the Department's Brexit Unit met with this group to update

our stakeholders on developments and listen to concerns or any issues arising. Brexit will be a standing item on the agenda of future meetings of this group.

Organisations attending All Island Sectoral Dialogue: 16 February 2017
Age Action Ireland
Alone
British-Irish Chamber of Commerce
Centre for Cross-Border Studies
Citizens Information Board [CIB]
Crosscare Migrant Project
Department of the Taoiseach
Deaf Hear
European Anti Poverty Network - EAPN Ireland
EURES Cross Border Partnership
FLAC
IBEC
Irish Congress of Trade Unions [ICTU]
Irish Local Development Network
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed [INOUE]
Irish Rural Link
Irish Senior Citizens Parliament
ISME
Maynooth NUIM
National Economic and Social Council [NESC]
National Youth Council of Ireland
New Communities Partnership
North/South Ministerial Council
Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection
One Family
Pavee Point
The Pensions Authority
Office of the Pensions Ombudsman
The Pensions Council
Retired Workers' Committee - ICTU
Safe Home Ireland
Simon Community
SIPTU (incl SIPTU retired members)
Social Democratic Labour Party [SDLP]
Social Justice Ireland
Treoir
Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

Question No. 1923 answered with Question No. 1913.

Budget 2018

1924. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Pro-

tection the expenditure savings that are earmarked for her Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38901/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Mid-Year Expenditure Report, published in July, sets out the Pre-Budget Ceiling for the Department of Social Protection for 2018. The amount included in this ceiling reflects certain demographic pressures primarily relating to the state pension and anticipated savings from reductions in expenditure on the Live Register. As part of the Budget Estimates process, the forecast of changes in Live Register-related expenditure and changes in other Social Protection scheme expenditure is subject to reassessment. This assessment is ongoing and will be considered in the context of the preparation of the Estimates for 2018. Where any savings are identified, such savings could be used to meet any emerging spending pressures without impacting on fiscal space.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

1925. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a domiciliary care grant for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [38916/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from this lady on the 23rd December 2016. This application was not allowed as the child was not considered to satisfy the qualifying conditions for the allowance. A letter issued on the 7th April 2017 outlining the decision of the deciding officer to refuse the allowance.

An appeal of this decision was requested on 4th May 2017. The application will be re-examined by a deciding officer and a revised decision will be made if warranted, or alternatively, the case will be referred for consideration by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

The person concerned will be notified of the outcome of the deciding officer's review as soon as it is completed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Payments

1926. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason participants on community employment schemes are not allowed to draw down the fuel allowance in two lump-sum payments; the rationale for this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38920/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fuel Allowance is a means tested payment to assist householders on long-term social welfare payments who are unable to provide for their own heating needs. Fuel allowance is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household. Up until now fuel allowance was payable as a weekly payment only.

I recently announced that the Department's fuel allowance customers would be given a choice to be paid in two lump sums, if they wished to have this option, rather than a weekly payment. This is being done initially on a trial basis for the upcoming fuel season. Recipients of the lump sum payment are in effect getting up front advances of payment on what would have

been weekly payments for the duration of the fuel season. As it is a trial and as participants on Community Employment Schemes and the Rural Social Schemes (Tús and Gateway) are not paid directly by my Department, these customers are not being given the option of the lump sum payment this time round. The lump sum approach to payment of the fuel allowance will be fully reviewed at the end of this fuel season and the feasibility of extending the choice of payment frequency to these other cohorts of customers will be examined further at that stage.

Invalidity Pension Payments

1927. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if he will issue a certificate of earnings for 2015 and 2016 from the invalidity section to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38941/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

A statement of his IP payments for 2015 and 2016 issued to the gentleman concerned on the 7 September 2017 as requested.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

1928. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the payment of family income supplement to persons who are on community employment project schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38950/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an in-work support, which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. FIS is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. There are currently nearly 57,000 families with more than 126,000 children in receipt of FIS. The estimated spend on FIS this year is approximately €422 million.

To qualify for FIS, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount, which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

My Department provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers. These supports include employment schemes such as Community Employment (CE), Tús, and Gateway. One cannot get FIS if on one of these schemes. These schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping stone back to employment. The objective of these schemes is to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities to return to the labour market. It is possible for a household to receive a FIS payment where the spouse or partner of the FIS applicant is engaged on one of these schemes. However, to pay FIS directly to someone who is participating in one of these schemes would reduce the incentive for that person to move off a supported

employment programme and into full time remunerative employment.

Research from the ESRI shows that people are better off in work, the results, based on an analysis of current incomes, benefits and taxes, suggest that more than eight out of ten of these unemployed jobseekers would see their income increase by at least 40 per cent upon taking up employment. FIS helps recipients to gain a firm foothold in work and build a better future for their families.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Eligibility

1929. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a State pension, non-contributory, for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [38971/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for State pension (non-contributory) was received from the person concerned on 16 August 2017. A request for further information issued to the person on 29 August 2017 and their reply was received on 4 September 2017.

The case is currently being considered by a Deciding Officer. When a decision has been made, the person concerned will be notified of the outcome without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 1930 and 1931 answered with Question No. 1849.

Public Services Card

1932. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the terms of the contract to supply the public services card; the changes to this contract over time; the date for renewal of this contract; her plans in this regard; the company awarded this contract; the dataset provided to produce the cards; the jurisdiction in which they operate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38978/17]

1933. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated cost of producing public services cards within her Department; the business case for outsourcing their production; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38979/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1932 and 1933 together.

My Department (on behalf of the public service) entered into a contract for the production, personalisation and distribution of 3 million Public Services Cards (PSC) by the end of 2017. To date, over 2.8 million cards have been issued. As the initiative is demand-led, it isn't possible to predict precisely when three million PSCs will be issued. The Department is considering a number of options for continued production of the PSC when the current contract expires at the end of this year.

The contract was awarded to Biometric Card Services (BCS), an Irish registered company based in Co. Wicklow. It was a condition of award of the contract that all data and related ser-

vices provision and operation be provided on-site in Ireland and subject to the jurisdiction of the Irish Courts. As a consequence, the cards are produced in Ireland. A number of changes have been made to the contract since its award, primarily to deal with the implementation of new and additional security measures, to facilitate the implementation of new Free Travel software specification, and to allow extension of the contract period to the end of 2017.

The data items sent to BCS for card production purposes are: Forename(s), Surname, Mothers Birth Surname, Birth Surname, Sex, Date of birth, Place of Birth Nationality, Title, Suffix, Address, Photo, Signature, Security Questions and Answers, SAFE Registration Level, Card Request Number, Priority, Card Type, PSC Expiry Date, Magstripe Data, Free Travel Expiry Date (if applicable), and Free Travel Ticket Type (if applicable).

Once PSCs are personalised (i.e. the data is put on a card), the data used to personalise them is not retained by BCS but is destroyed as an automatic part of the personalisation process in accordance with advice provided by the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner. Additionally, the systems used in the card production have been subjected to audit by external experts.

The production of the PSC is a technical process that requires specialist and expensive equipment and data security technologies. The Department does not have the relevant expertise to undertake this production and does not have the long-term scale required to warrant the level of capital investment for the equipment and facilities needed. Accordingly, the Department never considered producing the PSC within the Department and does not have estimates for same.

Departmental Communications

1934. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will direct her Department to ensure that all inquiry telephone numbers are free-fone or lo-call for those calling her Department from mobile telephones in view of the fact that large numbers of persons on low incomes do not have a land-line service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38998/17]

1935. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will direct her Department to ensure that all inquiry telephone numbers are free-fone or lo-call; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [38999/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1934 and 1935 together.

Telephone is the preferred method of communication for many of the Departments customers. The Department is commencing a review of the use of Lo-call numbers from a customer service perspective.

Lo-call numbers have been in operation for the Department's scheme areas for a number of years. These have been coupled with Interactive Voice Response technology to facilitate customers making quick contact with the appropriate section of the Department at a low cost to the caller.

Customers calling the Departments LoCall numbers from a landline will only pay a local call charge. However, where calls are from a mobile they can, on occasion, be more expensive. Where lo-call numbers are displayed on our website, the Department lists the landline options first. Accordingly, the Departments' website alerts the public to the fact the rates charged for the use of 1890 numbers may vary among different service providers.

Staff of the Department will always facilitate a call back to the customer if they have a particular concern about the call charges.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 1936 answered with Question No. 1870.

Question No. 1937 withdrawn.

Questions Nos. 1938 and 1939 answered with Question No. 1870.

Motor Tax Yield

1940. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of motor tax collected in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [36909/17]

1941. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons who pay their tax in a once-off yearly payment; and the amount that is accrued from the motor tax. [36910/17]

1942. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the percentage of persons who pay motor tax quarterly or half yearly. [36911/17]

1943. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the yield to the Exchequer from the excess charged to persons who do not pay their motor tax in one payment but spread it over the year with quarterly or twice yearly payments. [36912/17]

1944. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost per year if motor tax was charged at the same rate to every person regardless of whether they pay on a yearly, twice yearly or quarterly basis. [36913/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1940 to 1944, inclusive, together.

Total gross receipts from motor tax collected each year from 2011 to 2016 and for 2017 (up to 31 August) are set out as follows:

Year	Total gross motor tax receipts
2011	€1.010bn
2012	€1.054bn
2013	€1.137bn
2014	€1.159bn
2015	€1.124bn
2016	€1.051bn
2017 (to 31 August)	€726m

There were 2.6m vehicles under current taxation at 31 December 2016. Information on the percentage of motorists availing of the half-yearly and quarterly options is not collated – motorists can tax annually, half-yearly or quarterly and may avail of more than one option in respect of the same vehicle over the course of a year. The total number of discs issued in 2016 and the relevant percentages for each option were as follows:

Annual	1,648,737	33%
Half-yearly	683,652	13.8%
Quarterly	2,654,977	53.2%
Total number of discs issued 2016	4,987,366	

Total receipts from those availing of the annual option in 2016 were €494.5m.

Based on motor tax receipts in 2016, receipts from the surcharge associated with the half-yearly and quarterly options was €55.4m and, accordingly, the cost of abolishing the surcharge would be likely to be of that order in a full year.

Motor Tax Collection

1945. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the basis upon which motor tax must be retrospectively paid on a commercial vehicle that has been off the road for one year in circumstances in which it would not have been tested for road safety during that year as it was off the road; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37115/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Non-Use of Motor Vehicles Act 2013 came into effect on 1 July 2013. The primary purpose of the Act is to replace the system whereby a vehicle was declared off the road retrospectively with a system under which the vehicle must be declared off the road in advance. The system of making retrospective declarations had become a means of evasion of motor tax estimated to have cost some €50m annually.

The Act provides that a vehicle can be declared off the road for a minimum period of three months and a maximum period of twelve months. Where the owner of a vehicle wishes to make a declaration of non-use, he or she must do so during the final month of an existing tax disc or a previously made declaration of non-use.

Where a declaration of non-use is not made in the final month of a tax disc or previously made declaration of non-use, a vehicle must be taxed for the minimum period provided for in motor tax legislation for the category of vehicle concerned, in this instance three months, irrespective of the reason for the vehicle being off the road. Any arrears of motor tax payable in respect of the vehicle must also be paid. A new declaration can then be made at any stage during the final month of the new motor tax disc if the vehicle is thereafter not going to be in use in a public place.

In respect of roadworthiness testing, the Act contains a provision that a vehicle may be used during the period of a declaration of non-use solely for the purpose of bringing it to or from a test centre or to or from a premises for repair where an appointment has been made with an authorised tester subsequent to the repairs being carried out.

Local Authority Finances

1946. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria for borrowing money (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37460/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Borrowing of money by local authorities is governed by section 106 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended). The decision to borrow is a reserved function of the elected members of local authorities, who have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions and are accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. As such, it is a matter for each local authority to determine its own spending priorities in the context of the annual budgetary process, having regard to both locally identified needs and available resources.

Under section 106, borrowing by a local authority must be sanctioned by the appropriate Minister, i.e. the Government Minister with policy responsibility for the policy area concerned. If the borrowing is in respect of matters which relate to the responsibility or interest of only one Minister then it is the responsibility of that particular Minister. If the matter relates to the responsibility or interest of two or more Ministers, it is the responsibility of the Minister which has the greatest interest in the matter. In the event that there is no clear sanctioning Minister my Department may also sanction loans or co-ordinate a loan approval request seeking observations from a number of Departments on different aspects of a loan sanction request.

All sanctioning Departments are required to engage with my Department, which will provide an assessment of the financial viability of potential loans insofar as individual local authorities are concerned, and an assessment as to whether the borrowing can be accommodated within the context of the fiscal rules.

Upon receipt of an application my Department initiates a process of assessment. The purpose of this is to provide the sanctioning Department with observations on the suitability of sanctioning the loan both from a General Government Balance and a financial and affordability perspective. In reviewing requests for sanction, priority is given to loans for infrastructural investment and contractual commitments.

Tribunals of Inquiry Expenditure

1947. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there are ongoing fees being paid relating to the Flood and Mahon tribunals; the areas of expenditure and the amount, for example, legal fees and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37522/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

1948. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress his Department has made in respect of the EUROSTAT investigation into the establishment by the Government of a bond to finance social housing investment suitable for credit unions to invest their surplus funds in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38048/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance and supports the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for hous-

ing. The Programme further provides for consideration, with all stakeholders, as to how credit unions can support the delivery of social housing.

Credit Union bodies have set out proposed means by which funding could be provided by credit unions to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for the development of social housing. My Department and the Department of Finance have met with the credit union representative bodies on a number of occasions to examine how their sector can assist in the area of financing social housing delivery.

Conscious of the independence of the Central Bank in its regulatory role in respect of credit unions, bilateral engagement has taken place between my Department and the Department of Finance to consider the potential regulatory and legislative implications of credit union involvement in the social housing sector. Both Departments have also met with the Central Bank to provide information of a technical nature in relation to social housing funding arrangements. This was with a view to assisting the Central Bank in understanding how these arrangements operate, as it deals with issues arising from proposals put forward for credit union investment in social housing.

I note the publication in May 2017 by the Central Bank of the Consultation on Potential Changes for the Investment Framework for Credit Unions. The potential changes that are provided for would allow for investment by credit unions in the delivery of social housing by the larger Approved Housing Bodies which are categorised as ‘Tier 3’ under the voluntary regulation framework for the AHB sector.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by AHBs with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHBs and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme which is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements, provides that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term period, typically 20 years. In return, the housing unit is made available for social housing purposes.

Changes are now being proposed to this scheme in order to facilitate larger institutional private investors to become involved in the financing of social housing. Subject to other regulatory requirements being met, this could include credit unions.

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) is acting as financial advisor to my Department in this work and has undertaken market engagement in the development of the scheme. The new arrangements arising from this process are being tested to ensure that there is no negative impact arising from how they are viewed and treated in respect of the State’s General Government Balance. As part of this process, the proposed changes have been examined by Eurostat. Work on the scheme is well advanced, with details expected to be announced later this year.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness emphasises the need to look at new ways of funding social housing delivery, in particular the need to provide structural, funding and policy supports to increase delivery of social housing by Approved Housing Bodies. In that context, it states that support will be provided to an Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)/sector-led new special purpose vehicle, involving investors which could potentially include the credit union movement.

In May 2017, my Department announced funding of €49,000 for the ICSH to support this initiative, with the aim of establishing a sector-led financial vehicle to allow AHBs to expand and to facilitate the delivery of additional housing units. Ultimately, the funding structure required to facilitate credit union involvement in the financing of social housing will have a neu-

tral impact on General Government Debt, or be “off balance sheet” using the more commonly applied term.

The mechanisms to be used in the deployment of investment funds will have to be agreed by credit unions, with the support of their members and with the agreement of the Central Bank. My Department remains available to provide any necessary technical advice and support.

Water Quality

1949. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the actions being taken to improve water quality in rivers following the Environmental Protection Agency’s report on river quality in Ireland, 2010 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38247/17]

2039. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the assistance he will provide to Fingal County Council to improve the quality of the water in the Tolka river in view of the recent report from the Environmental Protection Agency (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38246/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1949 and 2039 together.

The EU Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy) establishes a common framework for the protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater. The overall aim of the Directive is to maintain high and good status waters where they exist and to restore waters that do not currently adequately support aquatic ecosystems. River basin management planning, structured in six-year cycles, is the tool prescribed by the Directive for achieving these aims.

As part of the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in Ireland, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is charged with, inter alia, the monitoring of water status in order to establish a comprehensive overview of water status within each river basin district. The EPA’s most recent report in this regard, *Water Quality in Ireland 2010-2015*, was published on 31 August 2017. The report provides an update on the status and trends in status of Irish waters following the completion of the first six-year cycle of the Water Framework Directive (2010–2015).

The overall finding of the report is that the quality of our surface waters has remained static since 2007-2009, with 57 per cent of rivers achieving either good or high status. In this regard, nationally, there has been a 1 per cent decline in the number of high or good status river water bodies in 2010-2015 compared with the status reported in 2007-2009.

The second-cycle River Basin Management Plan (RBMP), for the period up to the year 2021, is currently under preparation, with a draft Plan having been published in February 2017 for a mandatory six-month public consultation process (available at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/river-basin-management-plans/public-consultation-draft-river-basin-management>).

The draft RBMP sets out comprehensive programmes of more than sixty measures to protect and restore water status. These programmes of measures are specifically designed to address the significant pressures on water quality, such as agriculture, domestic waste water systems, urban waste water, urban run-off, forestry, the extractive industry, invasive species,

physical modification, abstractions/diversions, industry, waste, historically polluted sites and water treatment. Within these programmes of measures and in order to make best use of available resources, the implementation priorities are:

- (i) full implementation of existing EU Directives;
- (ii) preventing deterioration;
- (iii) meeting the water-related objectives for protected areas;
- (iv) protecting and restoring high status objective waters; and
- (v) targeted actions in focus catchments.

Local authorities will play a critical role in the implementation of the programmes of measures. In particular, the Local Authority National RBMP Office, supported by five regional committees, will have responsibility for co-ordinated delivery of measures at regional and local level. This Office will be supported by a dedicated staffing resource, organised on a regional basis, to assist with measures to improve water quality and to conduct further technical work and investigation, as necessary. My Department is currently working with the Local Authority sector regarding the establishment of this Office.

In the context of the development of the second-cycle RBMP for Ireland, there will be a single, national River Basin District (RBD) resulting from a merger of the Eastern, South Eastern, South Western, Western and Shannon RBDs that had been provided for in the first-cycle RBMPs. As such, the draft second-cycle RBMP applies to all water bodies in the State, including the former Eastern RBD, of which the River Tolka forms part.

The finalised second-cycle RBMP is due for completion by the end of 2017, following a consideration of all the submissions received as a result of the public consultation process.

Foreshore Issues

1950. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 249 of 21 June 2016, the status of a landholding (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38542/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The area in question appears to be State Owned Foreshore. However, there is no record of consent being granted to carry out any reclamation works. It has been used and occupied for many years without consent and without the payment of rent which, except in exceptional circumstances, foreshore leases or licences attract.

My Department is in on-going communication with the legal advisor to the person named seeking to clarify when the reclamation of foreshore took place and who carried out the reclamation. Once this has been clarified the next necessary steps will be taken in consultation with the State's legal advisors.

Water Services Data

1951. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the annual capital investment spend on domestic water and sanitation services in each of

the years 2000 to 2021, in tabular form. [36809/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The total annual capital investment by my Department on water services from 2000 to 2013 is outlined in the following table. This represents the expenditure by the Department on the provision of water and waste water infrastructure through the Water Services Investment Programme (WSIP) and the Rural Water Programme (RWP). The Department only funded the component of infrastructure relating to the domestic sector in these years, with the local authorities or group water schemes as appropriate meeting the costs of the non-domestic sector on a cost recovery basis. In the case of local authority schemes, this was calculated on a project by project basis but on average would have been 20%-25% of total costs. In some years, a small proportion of the funding below was in support of the investment programme rather than direct asset investment, e.g. through funding actions on river basin management plans and water sector reform. If these are excluded in 2013, the total cost of public water and waste water investment for the domestic sector was €237m.

Exchequer Capital Expenditure on Water and Wastewater Services 2000-2013 (€m)

Year	WSIP	RWP	TOTAL
Year	WSIP	RWP	TOTAL
2000	380	45	425
2001	453	53	506
2002	435	57	492
2003	375	75	450
2004	314	86	400
2005	299	119	418
2006	335	129	464
2007	367	130	497
2008	391	105	496
2009	412	100	512
2010	407	88	495
2011	350	79	429
2012	268	40	308
2013	241	34	275

Since January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for the delivery of public water and waste water services and the direct Exchequer provision through the Departmental Vote has funded only the rural water programme (group water schemes, private wells and septic tanks). Exchequer Expenditure between 2014 and 2017 for this programme is set out as follows.

Year	Rural Water Programme (€m)
2014	16
2015	17
2016	15
2017 (Estimate)	17.8

Funding for 2018 and beyond is under consideration as part of the Estimates process and the Review of the Capital Plan.

Total capital expenditure by Irish Water on public water services infrastructure from 2014 to 2017 is set out in the following table. The expenditure also includes the funding of the metering programme, establishment costs and outstanding local authority balances. Some €110m was

expended by Irish Water in 2013 on metering and establishment costs.

Capital Expenditure on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure by Irish Water (2014-2017)

Year	Total Expenditure (accruals basis) €m
2014	740
2015	544
2016	459
2017 (Forecast)	625
Total	2,368

The total capital programme in these years has been funded by Debt, Equity from the Minister for Finance, and customer revenue (including the subvention provided by the Department from the Local Government Fund in place of some elements of domestic costs). The €2.4 billion in forecast expenditure to end 2017 forms part of the €5.5 billion capital programme set out in the Irish Water Business Plan 2014-2021. The Commission for Energy Regulation has approved the capital spending for the current regulatory period to end 2018 and the 2019-2021 is being re-profiled in the light of investment to date.

Arising from recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services, a new funding model is being put in place for Irish Water. This will involve the State funding the cost of domestic water services. The requirements for 2018 to 2021 are being finalised in the context of the 2018 Estimates and the Capital Plan. The Commission for Energy Regulation in examining costs of Irish Water, both operational and capital, applies a split of 80:20 between domestic and non-domestic costs. The non-domestic costs will continue to be met on a cost recovery basis from non-domestic customers.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1952. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 65 of 13 July 2017, the estimated percentage of the population paying more than a third of their income for housing. [36833/17]

2006. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to introduce an affordable housing scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37744/17]

2018. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress his Department has made on the reintroduction of the affordable housing scheme that was suspended during the recession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38083/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1952, 2006 and 2018 together.

The Government recognises the housing affordability pressures faced by many households, particularly in certain parts of the country. It is for this reason that the overarching objective of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is to increase the supply of new homes to 25,000 per annum by 2020. In particular, the aim is to increase the supply of high quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent, as quickly as possible, in areas where demand is greatest.

As signalled, the issue of housing affordability is being examined by my Department, including consideration of the latest data on household incomes, observed rents and house purchase prices, in the context of the ongoing focused review of Rebuilding Ireland. I expect this work to be concluded in the coming weeks and I will be considering the potential role of new initiatives in that context.

Departmental Reports

1953. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 213 of 28 March 2017 and 2143 of 20 June 2017, if the report in the case of a person (details supplied) has been submitted to his Department; if he is satisfied with the length of time it is taking to finalise this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36872/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department received a report from Galway City Council in relation to the matter in question on 1 June 2017.

The matters referred to in the report are of a serious nature and are being treated accordingly. While my Department's consideration of the matter is taking somewhat longer to complete than initially envisaged, it will be completed as quickly as possible, subject to the imperative of giving full consideration to the matter.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1954. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a scheme for affordable sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36923/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing authorities have powers to make low-cost sites available to persons who are qualified for social housing support and to voluntary or co-operative not-for-profit housing associations. I have no plans at present to amend the conditions under which such sites are made available.

The Government recognises the housing affordability pressures faced by many households, particularly in certain parts of the country. It is for this reason that the overarching objective of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is to increase the supply of new homes to 25,000 per annum by 2020. In particular, the aim is to increase the supply of high quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent, as quickly as possible, in areas where demand is greatest.

The issue of affordability is being examined by my Department, in the context of the ongoing review of Rebuilding Ireland, with an emphasis on identifying new initiatives that add value and raise ambition with regard to increasing the supply of housing, including affordable homes, where they are needed. I expect this work to be concluded in the coming weeks.

Departmental Staff Data

1955. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary as-

sistants, secretarial assistants, special advisers, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work in his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36952/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

All political appointments to my Department in the period referred to have been made in accordance with the relevant Guidelines and Instructions on Ministerial Appointments for the 31st and 32nd Dáil.

Under the terms of the Guidelines, the role of Personal Assistants and Personal Secretaries is to provide assistance to or for the office holder who selected them for appointment.

With effect from the 32nd Dáil, Parliamentary Assistants and Secretarial Assistants are no longer employed by specific Government Departments but instead are directly employed by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Seconded staff have generally acted as clerical and administrative support in Minister or Ministers of State constituency offices with the exception of two individuals who acted as Private Secretaries (to Minister Kelly and Minister of State English) and who were seconded from other Government Departments. Otherwise, staff working in the Ministers' departmental offices have been departmental staff and not on secondment.

In the case of Special Advisers the duties are set out in Section 11 of the Public Service Management Act 1997. The information requested as regards numbers and salary is set out in the following tables.

31st Dail (2015/2016)

Minister Alan Kelly – Political Appointments

Job Title	Grade	Salary Scale
Special Adviser	Principal Officer (Standard) Non PPC Scale	€75,647 – €92,550
Special Adviser	Principal Officer (Standard) PPC Scale	€79,401 – €97,194
Personal/Parliamentary Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale (PPC)	€46,016 – €59,011
Personal Secretary/Secretarial Assistant	Personal Secretary Scale (Non PPC)	€23,820 - €47,755
Civilian Driver X 2*	Civilian Driver Rate	€631.75€665.00
Seconded Staff	EO Standard – Private Secretary**	€29,314 - €45,616
	EO Standard x 3 – Constituency Office	€29,314 - €45,616

* The salary for Civilian Drivers was €631.75 per week. Drivers who became members of the new Single Pension Scheme were paid a rate of €665.00 per week.

**This post also carries an allowance of €19,653 per annum in respect of extra attendance etc.

In addition to the above, Minister Kelly appointed a temporary replacement in situ for one

Special Adviser who was absent on unpaid long term sick leave toward the end of his term.

Minister of State Paudie Coffey – Political Appointments

Job Title	Grade	Salary Scale
Personal/Parliamentary Assistant	Personal Assistant Scale (PPC)	€46,016 - €59,011
Personal Secretary/Secretarial Assistant	Personal Secretary Scale (PPC)	€25,074 - €50,268
Civilian Driver X 2*	Civilian Driver Rate	€631.75€665.00
Seconded Staff	CO Constituency Office	€21,879 - €37,341

* The salary for Civilian Drivers was €631.75 per week. Drivers who became members of the new Single Pension Scheme were paid a rate of €665.00 per week.

32nd Dail (2016/2017)

Minister Simon Coveney – Political Appointments

Job Title	Grade	Salary Scale
Special Adviser	Principal Officer (Standard) Non PPC Scale	€75,647 – €92,550 Post 1st April 2017 €77,849 - €95,487
Special Adviser	Principal Officer (Standard) PPC Scale	€79,401 – €97,194 Post 1st April 2017 € 81,767 - €100,333
Civilian Driver X 2*	Civilian Driver Rate	€631.75€665.00 Post April 2017 €650.92€684.17
Seconded Staff	HEO Standard (PPC) Constituency Office	€46,081 - €58,294 Post April 2017 €47,081 - €59,294
	EO – Constituency Office	€29,314 - €45,616 Post April 2017 €30,314 - € 46,616

* The salary for Civilian Drivers was €631.75 per week. Drivers who became members of the new Single Pension Scheme were paid a rate of €665.00 per week.

Minister of State Damien English – Political Appointments

Job Title	Grade	Salary Scale
Civilian Driver X 2*	Civilian Driver Rate	€631.75€665.00 Post April 2017 €650.92€684.17
Seconded Staff	HEO Standard - Private Secretary**	€43,816 - € 55,415 Post April 2017 €44,816 - €56,415
	EO – Constituency Office	€29,314 - €45,616 Post April 2017 €30,314 - € 46,616
	CO Constituency Office	€21,879 - €37,341 Post April 2017 €22,879 - €38,341

*The salary for Civilian Drivers was €631.75 per week. Drivers who became members of the new Single Pension Scheme were paid a rate of €665.00 per week.

**This post also carries an allowance of €19,653 per annum in respect of extra attendance etc

Minister Eoghan Murphy – Political Appointments

Job Title	Grade	Salary Scale
Special Adviser	Principal Officer (Standard) PPC Scale	€81,767 - €100,333
Civilian Driver X 2	Civilian Driver Rate	€684.17
Seconded Staff	OGP Category Specialist PPC - Constituency Office	€39,235 - €52,958

Minister of State John Paul Phelan – Political Appointments

Job Title	Grade	Salary Scale
Civilian Driver X 2	Civilian Driver Rate	€684.15

Homeless Persons Data

1956. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will request that the statistical data relating to the Dublin Region Homeless Executive's, DRHE, protocol (details supplied) be published on a monthly and timely basis, specifically the data relating to families and children involved. [37153/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities. Therefore, my Department has no function in relation to the issue raised as is a matter for the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, which operates a shared homeless service on behalf of the four Dublin housing authorities.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Administration

1957. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will review the purchase scheme for persons (details supplied) in local authority houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37238/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 specifically provides that the Minister's power to issue policy directions and guidelines to housing authorities in relation to their housing functions shall not be construed as enabling the Minister to exercise any power or control in relation to any individual case with which a housing authority is or may be concerned. Therefore, I am specifically precluded by law from intervening in this or any other individual case.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least 1 year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In

the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, it is essential that an applicant's income is of a long-term and sustainable nature. This is necessary to ensure that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Building Regulations

1958. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress which has been made to establish an appropriate redress scheme for home owners in counties Donegal and Mayo in circumstances in which defective block work has been found to have compromised the structural integrity of their homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37239/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

The panel had the following terms of reference:

(i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;

(ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

(iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and

(iv) To submit a report within six months.

On 13 June 2017, the report of the Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was published and included eight recommendations, which my Department are now advancing.

My Department has already taken action to implement recommendations 1 and 2 as priori-

ties.

With regard to Recommendation 1, the Department has conducted several meetings with the NSAI recently to advance the establishment of a Technical Committee to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in regard to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowner/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland provided assurance that they will collaborate with the Department, the NSAI and others on measures to establish such a register.

On 19 July 2017, I visited Donegal and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, the elected members of Donegal County Council, local authority officials, and other interested parties on the issue of the publication of the Report of the Expert Group on Concrete Blocks.

On 27 July 2017, I visited Mayo and held similar meetings with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, some elected members of Mayo County Council, and other interested parties on the issue of the publication of the Report of the Expert Group on Concrete Blocks.

In addition and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

1959. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the review of the incremental tenant purchase scheme will conclude; if his attention has been drawn to concerns that the existing scheme discriminates against tenants living in areas with inflated house prices, older tenants and working tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37241/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum, have been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year and have been allocated a house under a local authority allocation scheme.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Departmental Staff Data

1960. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37242/17]

1961. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of men and women respectively in his Department who hold posts (details supplied). [37243/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1960 and 1961 together.

The information requested is set out in the following tables based on the most recent figures available at the end of June 2017 for the then Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Along with normal day-to-day staff changes in the intervening time, the Department has also transferred responsibility for the Community function to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Women	Men	Total
319	374	693

Grade	Women	Men	Total
Secretary General	0	1	1
Second Secretary	0	0	0
Deputy Secretary	0	0	0
Assistant Secretary	4	2	6
Principal	8	24	32
Assistant Principal	37	41	78

Departmental Expenditure

1962. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the total cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37244/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested is set out in the following table.

-	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Credit Cards						
Government Stamp Duty	€120.00	€326.98	€180.00	€180.00	€120.00	€926.98
Allied Irish Bank - Annual Fees	€338.10	€412.07	€214.32	€246.25	€40.32	€1,251.06

-	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Credit Cards						

Government Stamp Duty	€120.00	€326.98	€180.00	€180.00	€120.00	€926.98
Allied Irish Bank - Annual Fees	€338.10	€412.07	€214.32	€246.25	€40.32	€1,251.06
Bank Charges						
Allied Irish Bank	€1,535.15	€1,350.20	€5,167.19	€2,026.29	€0.00	€10,078.83
Ulster Bank	€0.00	€65.38	€85.00	€60.00	€61.52	€271.90
Bank of Ireland	€6,508.06	€3,440.63	€1,986.05	€1,434.00	€1,625.68	€14,994.42

The bank charges shown above comprise charges on current accounts for making payments and taking in receipts and do not relate to credit cards. My Department does not operate any debit cards.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

1963. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a review being undertaken by his Department of the social housing assessment guidelines; if the applications process and income thresholds will be reviewed as part of the process; the timeframe for this review and the likely date for publication of the findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37245/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports is scheduled to commence later this year. I would expect the results of this review to be available for publication in early 2018.

Homeless Persons Supports

1964. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding homeless children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37246/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At the outset, it is important to clarify that policy responsibility for children who require safe accommodation without their parent(s) or guardian(s), referred to as children 'out of home', rests with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

With regard to families residing in emergency accommodation, with associated dependents, the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness outlines a number of actions to assist such households. The long-term solution to the current homeless issue is to increase the supply of homes and accordingly Rebuilding Ireland is designed to accelerate all types of housing supply. In particular, it seeks to achieve the delivery of increased volumes of social housing over the coming years (47,000 units by 2021). It is intended that the long-term housing needs of households in emergency accommodation will be met through a range of social housing supports, such as the enhanced Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, and general social housing allocations. Successes are being achieved in this regard; in 2016, over 3,000 sustainable exits from homelessness into independent tenancies were achieved; in the first quarter of 2017 over 900 such exits were achieved and, while I am awaiting full confirmation from authorities, I expect a similar level for the subsequent quarter.

To mitigate the issues associated with the volume of homeless families currently accommodated in inappropriate temporary arrangements, in addition to the actions outlined above, housing authorities are pursuing a range of new supported temporary accommodation initiatives. These custom-developed facilities, referred to as family hubs, will offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation, with the capacity to provide appropriate play-space, cooking and laundry facilities, communal recreation space, while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services and appropriate family supports.

Additional support services for families in emergency accommodation are available through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. These include: a special provision under the existing Community Childcare Subvention Programme of free childcare for children from homeless families; a special emphasis being placed on children from homeless families through the School Completion Programme; schools with Home School Community Liaison Coordinators are proactively engaging with the parents from homeless families to assist access to any other supports that may be of assistance; and children in homeless accommodation are being prioritised within the School Completion Programme for services such as breakfast and homework clubs.

Also, as signalled, a targeted review of Rebuilding Ireland, with an emphasis on identifying new initiatives that add value and raise ambition with regard to increasing the supply of social and affordable homes, is well underway. In that context, a number of new initiatives in relation to homelessness were announced on 8 September 2017, details of which are available at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/statement-minister-eoghan-murphy-following-housing-summit>.

Homeless Persons Data

1965. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless children in County Kerry to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37247/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and are produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

As details on dependents are only collected by my Department on a regional basis, the specific data sought by the Deputy is not available from my Department and is a matter for the relevant housing authority.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

1966. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason income from the rural social scheme is not included as income in calculating reckonable income under the tenant purchase scheme 2016 in view of the fact that persons in the rural social scheme are allowed remain on the scheme until retirement age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37249/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least 1 year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, it is essential that an applicant's income is of a long-term and sustainable nature. This is necessary to ensure that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant. Therefore in the determining of reckonable income housing authorities shall disregard income that is once-off, temporary or short-term in nature and that is outside the regular pattern of a person's annual income.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Data

1967. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses purchased under the tenant purchase scheme in 2016 and to date in 2017 by local authority; the reason for the low uptake of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37250/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. This includes data on sales and applications to purchase during the calendar year 2016. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Relevant data for 2017 is not yet available. However, information on sale of local authority houses in previous years can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>.

Traveller Data

1968. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Travellers in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37251/17]

1969. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason homelessness data do not provide details on the number of Travellers in emergency accommodation; his plans to put a mechanism in place to ensure these data are collected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37252/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1968 and 1969 together.

Official homeless reports are published by my Department on a monthly basis capturing details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. These reports are available through my Department's website using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. These reports do not provide a breakdown by nationality or ethnic background and it is not proposed to commence the collection of such data at this time.

It should be noted that the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published a special report in August 2017, which provides a comprehensive enumeration of homeless persons, including a breakdown by nationality and ethnic background. This report, which is available on the CSO's website www.cso.ie identifies over 500 adults and children as 'Irish Traveller' in temporary accommodation on Census night.

Housing Data

1970. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 105 of 1 June 2017, the number of the 1,117 additional bed spaces of purpose built student accommodation completed since publishing the Rebuilding Ireland action plan in July 2016 which were in County Kerry; the number of the 8,670 student accommodation beds that are expected to be developed nationally by 2019 located in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37253/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Higher Education Authority published the Report on Student Accommodation: Demand & Supply in 2015 which indicated that the demand for student accommodation currently exceeded supply in certain parts of the country. The report included extensive discussions with Higher Education Institutes and other stakeholders and found that the shortages of available accommodation are high in Dublin, Cork and Galway and to a lesser extent in Limerick. Student accommodation in other geographical areas, including Kerry, was assessed to be generally sufficient to meet demand.

From the ongoing monitoring of planning and development projects by the Higher Education Authority, I understand that there have been no substantial purpose-built student accommodation projects built in Kerry since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland in July 2016. This HEA monitoring also indicates that there are no purpose-built student accommodation projects in the pre-planning or planning application stages currently.

Seaweed Harvesting Licences

1971. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of plans to sell the harvesting rights of kelp disk seaweed to a company (details supplied); if this deal has already gone through; and the way it will affect the County Clare coastline. [37254/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Under the Foreshore Act 1933, the removal of beach material, including seaweed, is prohibited without the consent of the Minister.

The named company has applied for a licence to harvest wild seaweed. During the course of assessing this and a number of other similar applications, it became clear that certain rights to harvest seaweed exist. My Department is in the process of ascertaining, with the assistance of the Attorney General, the legal interface and relationship between these traditional harvesting rights and the current applications. These applications, most of which are by companies, are effectively on hold until such time as my Department is in a position to bring clarity to the regulatory regime applying to the harvesting of wild seaweed. At that point the applications on hand will come before me for determination.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

1972. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing applicants who have applied but whose applications have been refused for the medical and disability priority list, by local authority in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37294/17]

1973. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing applicants who are on the medical and disability priority list by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37295/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1972 and 1973 together.

The assessment of applications for social housing support, and management of the lists of qualified households, including the recording of data on the number of applications refused, is the responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations.

Detailed information on the number of households currently on local authorities medical and disability priority lists is not held by my Department. The management of priority lists is a matter for individual housing authorities and the numbers fluctuate continually as, for example, households are allocated housing in accordance with an authority's allocation scheme.

The allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for individual housing authorities in accordance with their allocation schemes made under section 22 of the 2009 Act. Each housing authority is required to make an allocation scheme specifying, among other things, the manner of, and the order of priority for, the allocation of dwellings to households and classes of households on the waiting list. Allocation schemes may also contain provisions for exceptional or emergency cases, allowing immediate housing outside of normal waiting list priorities, should circumstances warrant it.

Details on the number of households qualified for social housing support in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments. The most recent figures available are the results of the 2016 Summary which are available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf .

It is important to note that the summary data does not refer to Local Authorities priority lists.

In line with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, future summaries will now be carried out on an annual basis. I expect the results of the 2017 summary to be available for publication later this year.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

1974. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the decision making process for medical and disability priority for local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37296/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The allocation of social housing support to qualified households is a matter for the local authority concerned, in accordance with its allocation scheme made in accordance with section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated Regulations.

This legislation requires all local authorities, as a reserved function, to make an allocation scheme determining the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings to households qualified for social housing support, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households. Under the 2009 Act, a household is defined as a person living alone, or two or more persons, who in the opinion of the local authority concerned, have a reasonable requirement to live together.

As such, it is a matter for each housing authority to decide on the type of support to be allocated to individual households. As Minister, I am precluded by the 2009 Act from intervening in relation to the procedures followed, or decisions made, by housing authorities in the allocation of particular dwellings.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

1975. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the name of the chief medical officer for each local authority housing section; the process of appointment for each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37297/17]

2025. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if each application for the medical priority housing list received by local authorities is assessed by a doctor; the name of each doctor who assesses applications for medical priority housing list by local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38167/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1975 and 2025 together.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

The assessment of households for social housing support, and the allocation of that support to qualified households is a matter for individual housing authorities in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations. As Minister, I am precluded by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 from intervening in rela-

tion to the procedures followed, or decisions made, by housing authorities in the assessment of households, the allocation of particular dwellings and the provision of social housing supports.

Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 provides the legislative framework that local authorities adhere to in the allocation of dwellings. Section 22 (3) requires housing authorities to make an allocation scheme that will determine the order of priority to be accorded in the allocation of dwellings and Section 22 (8) states that an allocation scheme may provide that housing authorities shall obtain and have regard to a report from a medical practitioner employed by the Health Service Executive in the allocation of dwellings where priority is claimed on grounds consisting of, or including, exceptional medical grounds.

Planning Data

1976. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of planning applications that were assessed as invalid in County Tipperary in the past three year period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37305/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website. The statistics collected relate to:

- Invalid applications received,
- Applications for outline permission and full permission,
- Decisions to grant/refuse permission,
- Decisions issued within the statutory eight week period,
- Decisions deferred,
- Percentages for grants/refusals, decisions made within eight weeks and decisions deferred.

The information requested by the Deputy is published on my Department's website in a document titled "Annual Planning Applications 2009 onwards" that is available at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1>.

Water Charges Administration

1977. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to equalise the position of persons connected to rural water schemes with regard to the cost of domestic water, in view of the fact that domestic water provided by Irish Water is now free of charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37327/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services reported in April 2017 and its Report was approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Committee recommended that the principles of equity of treatment and equivalent financial support should be applied equally between households on public water supplies and those in Group Schemes and those using individual water and waste water systems. I will shortly bring forward legislation to give effect to the recommendations of the Committee and my Department will com-

mence a review involving the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and other relevant stakeholders to advance the recommendation of the Committee in relation to the quantification of investment required to equalise treatment between those availing of domestic water services from Irish Water and those availing of private services..

Water Charges Administration

1978. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will review the multiple standing charges of water meters for business customers that require multiple connections for their business; if a single charge can be agreed and not treated as if each individual meter is a different customer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37328/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels. Metering is a matter for the utility and one in which I have no function.

Any business connected to a public water supply is liable for charges as a non-domestic customer. It should be noted that the arrangements in place for all non-domestic customers on 1 January 2014 remain in place with no changes for the time being.

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) is progressing a review of all aspects of non-domestic water tariffs and in conjunction with Irish Water will establish an enduring non-domestic tariff framework. The CER has published an information note informing customers and interested parties about the project and will shortly engage in a period of public consultation on the enduring tariff framework for non-domestic water and/or wastewater customers of Irish Water.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Government Audit Service

1979. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the local government auditors report to his Department on their findings from the audit of each local authority; if so, if each local authority is compliant with EU and national guidelines relevant to good governance and procurement; if breaches of EU or national laws, regulations and protocols are discovered in an audit; the person or body this is reported to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37330/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is a function of the Local Government Audit Service to carry out audits of the accounts of local authorities. Section 120 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, provides that the local government auditor may prepare a report on any matter or matters which come to his or her notice during the audit. These reports, along with copies of the audited financial statements of the local authorities are sent to the relevant local authority, the Director of Audit and the Minister.

A structure is in place to scrutinise any issues identified by the auditor during the course of the audit. Section 121 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, requires that a chief

executive of a local authority shall provide the audited financial statement or the report to the audit committee of the local authority for consideration at the next practicable meeting of that committee. Section 121 also provides that the local government auditor who conducted the audit shall attend a meeting of the audit committee to present his or her report and clarify such issues as may be necessary in relation to the content of the report. In addition, it also requires that the audit committee shall report to the relevant local authority on its consideration of the audited financial statement and the report at the next practicable meeting of the local authority.

With specific regard to procurement issues, the Local Government Strategic Procurement Centre, which is part of the Local Government Programme Management Office, has put in place a programme of training and education to ensure that staff involved in procurement are up to date in relation to the rules and trends in procurement.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

1980. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress made to date with the housing units identified in County Sligo in the Rebuilding Ireland programme; the estimated completion dates for these new local authority housing projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37345/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A comprehensive status list of social housing schemes nationally, including projects for Sligo County Council, can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>. This status report covers the period up to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017 and lists 607 approved social housing construction projects and their locations and contains a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered in 2016 and those progressing through planning, design and construction. Details in respect of Quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

These 607 projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by Approved Housing Bodies. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and AHBs concerned, in the first instance. However, within the overall 21,000 social housing solutions targeted for delivery this year, some 4,500 of these will be delivered through new builds/acquisitions and a significant proportion of these will involve new construction.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and AHBs, updated details of which will be published on a regular basis. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Private Rented Accommodation Deposits

1981. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will ensure the practice of non-refundable deposits to be considered for a tenancy (details supplied) will be outlawed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37363/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private

rented residential sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

The requesting and acceptance of booking deposits by landlords and letting agents from potential tenants of private rented accommodation, and any related rights and obligations, are not part of a tenancy and do not come within the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act.

Complaints in relation to the provision of a property service or the conduct of a Property Service Provider (PSP) can be made to the Property Services Regulatory Authority which has the power to investigate such complaints. PSPs include Auctioneers/Estate Agents, letting agents and management agents. Further details are available on the Authority's website at www.psr.ie.

Generally, moneys paid by a person to a Letting Agent by way of a "booking deposit" to secure a tenancy will be held in the Agent's "client account". When a person enters the tenancy, the "booking deposit" is paid/forwarded to their Client. Where no tenancy is entered into, the "booking deposit" should be refunded to the person by the Agent.

Where a booking deposit is paid to a Letting Agent, and the subsequent let does not proceed, and the Letting Agent retains some or all of the booking deposit for administration costs or other such charges, the PSRA is of the view that the Letting Agent is not permitted to retain the booking deposit (or part of it) as part of fees owing to the Agent. Where all or part of the booking deposit is withheld from the potential lessee by the Letting Agent, the PSRA will, on foot of a complaint, cause an investigation to be undertaken.

My Department is currently conducting a review of the Rent Predictability Measure and, on the basis of the RTB rent data and of the recently conducted consultation on the operation of the Rent Pressure Zones, is examining whether there is avoidance of the legislative requirements, either through the introduction of extra charges by landlords or the implementation of increases beyond those allowed under the legislation, and whether new approaches to ensuring compliance are necessary. Where policy and/or legislative changes are recommended on foot of the review, they will be implemented as a matter of priority.

Since 1 January 2016, a person cannot be discriminated against when renting because they are in receipt of housing supports or rent supplement. If a person feels that they have been discriminated against by a landlord or their agent, they can make a complaint under the Equal Status Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission. Further information is available on the Commission's website: <https://www.workplacerelations.ie>.

Water Charges

1982. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will quantify excessive water usage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37403/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government(Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services published its report in April and this was approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Committee recommended that the Commission for Energy Regulation should determine average consumption levels of water usage, setting the threshold level at 1.7 times the average household use. Further detail will be set out in the legislation which will give effect to the recommendations of the Committee and which will be published shortly.

Rent Pressure Zones

1983. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the next review of rent pressure zones will be carried out; when he will publish data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37415/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency continues to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria for designation as Rent Pressure Zones, they will be designated as rent pressure zones.

The Act provides that, in confirming whether or not the criteria have been met, the information relating to the area concerned must be determined by the information used to compile the RTB Rent Index quarterly report.

The RTB Rent Index Report for Quarter 2 2017 is expected to be published later this month.

Housing Provision

1984. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will clarify his comments on the fair deal scheme and the housing crisis made in August 2017; the way in which these changes will work; the way in which they will help the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37425/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), also known as the Fair Deal Scheme, was published by the Minister for Health in July 2015. A Working Group is overseeing the implementation of its recommendations, including any legislative changes that may be required.

Action 17 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector undertakes to examine the treatment under the NHSS’s financial assessment of income from the rental of a person’s principal private residence (PPR), where they move into long-term residential care. This examination aims to explore the potential to encourage vacant accommodation to be brought into active use.

My Department is currently engaging with the Department of Health in relation to this action. The Department of Health has received legal advice that changes to the treatment of rental income in the Scheme would require primary legislation. My Department has carried out a preliminary estimate on the potential number of units involved and is discussing practical proposals with the Department of Health to encourage these units back onto the market.

Private Rented Accommodation Deposits

1985. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 11 of 19 January 2017, his plans for legislative changes so that a deposit protection scheme can be implemented; the timeframe for legislative change to be brought forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37427/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 provides for, among other things, the estab-

ishment of a tenancy deposit protection scheme to be operated by the Residential Tenancies Board.

The Government is fully committed to the principle of ensuring effective protection of deposits. However, I am examining the current legislative provisions to take account of the changed circumstances since the scheme was first envisaged and determine what modifications and improvements should be made to ensure that the scheme, when introduced, can operate effectively and efficiently.

Having regard to the analysis and outcomes arising from the focused review of Rebuilding Ireland, any necessary legislative changes will be included in the General Scheme of a new simplified and consolidated Residential Tenancies Bill, as provided for under the Strategy for the Rental Sector.

Planning Issues

1986. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider a further extension of planning permission for dwelling houses in which an extension of five years has already been granted and in circumstances where the person has been unable to undertake the work due to economic circumstances; if he will consider enabling the further extension of planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37453/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the provisions of sections 40 and 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, planning permissions are generally granted for a period of five years with the possibility to extend that period by an additional period not exceeding five years to enable the development to which the permission relates to be completed subject to compliance with certain conditions.

These provisions were amended in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, and further amended in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2017, to allow - as an exceptional measure - for the granting of a second extension of duration of planning permission in respect of certain developments of 20 houses or more for the purposes of enabling such developments, on which substantial work has been carried out either during the appropriate period or any extension of that period, but where progress has been delayed due to the economic downturn, to be completed. In such cases, a second extension of duration of planning permission shall not extend beyond 31 December 2021, the end date of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness.

These arrangements in relation to the extension of duration of planning permissions are considered to be fair and reasonable and I have no plans to make any further legislative changes in this regard.

Traveller Accommodation

1987. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount it would cost to restore the Traveller accommodation budget to 2008 levels. [37455/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Traveller-specific accommodation is funded by means of 100% capital funding from my Department. Capital funding of €9m is being provided in 2017, an increase of €3.5m (64% increase) on the 2016 allocation. This is the third consecutive year that the capital budget has been increased. The traveller accommodation capital budget in 2008 was €40m, an additional €31m over the 2017 provision.

Homeless Persons Supports

1988. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of Exchequer funding allocated in the past five years and to date in 2017 for homeless services, in tabular form. [37456/17]

1989. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding allocated to each local authority in the past five years and to date in 2017 for the provision of homeless services, in tabular form. [37457/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 1988 and 1989 together.

My Department provides current funding to housing authorities towards the operational cost of providing accommodation and related services for homeless persons under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under 'Section 10' funding arrangements housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of any service they are funding from within their own resources. Furthermore, housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of the Section 10 funding arrangements.

In addition, the HSE provides funding toward health costs associated with homeless services and funding details in this regards are a matter for the Minister for Health.

Details of the Section 10 Exchequer funding provided to housing authorities by my Department for the years 2012-2016 and to date in 2017 are set out in the following table. It should be noted that an amount of €97.8 million has been provided for homeless services in 2017.

Funding under Section 10 of the Housing Act, 1988

Region	2012 - €	2013 - €	2014 - €	2015 - €	2016 - €	2017 (to date) - €
Dublin	32,398,290	31,322,223	35,322,223	48,270,201	68,627,075	23,771,369
Mid-East	839,146	811,275	928,489	1,716,245	2,746,651	900,000
Midland	672,027	649,707	649,707	805,995	1,109,748	829,630
Mid-West	3,516,119	3,399,336	3,405,060	3,499,898	3,500,000	2,625,000
North-East	910,194	879,963	879,963	996,849	1,493,336	750,000
North-West	360,865	348,879	348,879	387,643	411,946	337,500
South-East	1,848,877	1,787,469	1,818,969	2,394,619	3,041,840	2,268,584
South-West	4,418,967	4,272,197	4,307,772	5,000,686	5,375,609	4,161,725
West	1,581,478	1,528,951	1,544,712	1,698,834	2,370,295	1,763,138
Total	46,545,963	45,000,000	49,205,774	64,770,970	88,676,500	37,406,946

Housing Data

1990. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses built in each year since 2000, broken down by county and including the first half of 2017; the estimated deficit of housing in each county to date in 2017; the steps taken since 2011 to address this shortage of housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37501/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): ESB residential housing connections data represents the best available indicator that a house or apartment is completed and becoming available for occupation. ESB data, from 1996 onwards, are available on my Department's website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/node/6301>. The dataset will be updated to include data for June 2017 later this month.

ESB data includes recently completed once-off homes, multi-unit scheme developments and apartments as well as some re-connections to the grid where properties that have been unoccupied for over two years are being brought back into use. My Department is working with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to examine the potential for improving the data available to track new house completions, based on expanded ESB connection datasets and linking this data to other sources such as the Census.

In relation to the estimated annual national housing requirement, Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, published in July 2016, set a target of 25,000 new homes per annum by 2020, effectively doubling the output from the 12,600 recorded in 2015. The target was based on ESRI estimates at the time and the Plan recognised that this target may need to be exceeded to account for pent-up demand and accumulated under-supply over recent years.

In terms of social housing requirement, based on the latest Summary of Social Housing Assessments (December 2016), the total net household need was 91,600. The full report, covering each local authority area, is available on my Department's website at – http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf.

Rebuilding Ireland commits to the delivery of an additional 47,000 social housing homes over the 6-year life-time of the Action Plan for which a ring-fenced Exchequer budget of €5.35 billion is in place. In addition, some 87,760 households' needs will be met through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Schemes. Last year, €935 million was invested in providing some 19,000 new social housing supports, through new builds, refurbishments and acquisitions as well as through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme. In 2017, I expect that some 21,000 households will have their social housing needs met.

With regard to the wider housing market, a wide range of actions are already well advanced under Pillar 3 of Rebuilding Ireland to increase housing supply significantly, including through opening up State lands for housing; the €226m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund to provide enabling infrastructure; planning reforms and a new fast-track planning process; promoting more efficient design and delivery methods to reduce housing delivery costs; and a review of costs of construction to identify potential efficiencies to make schemes more viable.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, focuses on increasing the supply of rented accommodation and supporting the development of a stable, strong and viable rental sector, offering true choice for households, investment opportunities for providers and reflecting the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords.

Through the range of actions currently being progressed through Rebuilding Ireland to increase the supply of homes across all tenures, the Government has made considerable progress towards restoring a more sustainable and normally functioning housing market. Nevertheless, I am giving further consideration to housing supply issues in the context of the targeted review

of Rebuilding Ireland which is currently being concluded by my Department and which will be the subject of further announcements in relation to new and additional actions over the coming weeks.

Housing Adaptation Grant Funding

1991. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funds will be made available to local authorities for disabled persons' grants for local authority tenants in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37530/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides capital funding to Local Authorities with regard to Disabled Persons Grants on an annual basis. These grants allow Local Authorities to undertake adaptations and extensions to their existing social housing stock such as the installation of grab rails; stair lifts; showers; wet rooms; ramps etc.

An announcement will be made shortly in relation to the final DPG allocations for 2017. It should be noted that works can take place throughout the year to allow for the full utilisation of the annual funding allocation to each local authority and, to facilitate this and to ensure that there is no delay in respect of priority works under the programme, Local Authorities are allowed to undertake works up to a maximum value of 65% of their previous year's allocation in advance of notification of the full year's allocation.

Fire Safety

1992. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the fire safety report on timber dwellings commissioned by the previous Minister, Deputy Alan Kelly; when this report will be brought before Dáil Éireann; the reason it has taken over two years to publish this report; the report's main findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37547/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In July 2015, the then Minister directed that a review be undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application, in the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise. A Steering Group was convened to oversee the review.

The terms of reference of the Steering Group included the following: -

- Have regard to the typical risk profile faced by residents, their visitors and fire service personnel in and about apartment developments and housing estates;

- Take account of normal hazards and relevant safety management arrangements as well as typical passive and active safety features;

- Outline general advice and guidance which can be used by owners/residents and their professional advisers, to ensure that an adequate level of safety is in place for persons in and about their development. This may include making provision for - appropriate or enhanced fire detection and alarm measures; checking that appropriate escape routes from the premises are available, designed in accordance with current standards; ensuring evacuation plans are rehearsed in each premises in the event of a fire incident;

- Include a case study based on the Millfield estate at Newbridge, Co. Kildare.

The independent fire safety expert has completed his review and two reports have been received by my Department from the Steering Group. These are a 'Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in dwellings where concerns arise' and a 'Case Study'. It was necessary to obtain and consider legal advice in relation to the reports; based on the legal advice received, it was not possible to publish the Case Study; however, the Framework was published on 25 August 2017.

The Framework contains the following:

- an explanation of the statutory provisions in respect of fire safety, namely the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003, and the respective responsibilities of owners, designers, builders, occupants, local authorities;

- a range of actions that may reduce risk and improve the level of fire safety where deficiencies arise in dwelling houses, apartments and /or the common areas of apartment buildings; and

- a fire risk assessment methodology for professional advisors to prioritise the remedial actions, if any, that may need to be carried out on a dwelling.

The Framework is intended to be used as guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. In addition to owners and occupants, the Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable the continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

The applicability of the advice and guidance in the 'Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in dwellings where concerns arise' is being considered by the recently formed Fire Safety Task Force in the context of its work on the appraisal of existing arrangements and systems for Fire Safety.

Homeless Persons Data

1993. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when families and children in domestic violence refuges and accommodation will be included in official homeless figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37548/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) published a special report in August 2017, based on Census 2016, which provides a comprehensive enumeration of all categories of emergency accommodation, including domestic violence refuges. This report, which is available on the CSO's website, www.cso.ie, identifies just over 300 adults and children as accommodated in refuges on Census night. From an academic or social research perspective this report establishes a baseline figure for persons accommodated in refuges.

As regards the monthly homeless reports published by my Department, these provide details of individuals, families and dependents utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. These reports serve as important management information for my Department, the housing authority sector and the various State funded non-governmental organisations involved in the delivery of homeless services. The data included in these reports is produced by housing authorities using the Pathway Accommodation

& Support System (PASS), which is the single integrated national data information system on emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities.

When PASS was being introduced in 2013, the domestic violence refuge sector declined to avail of its availability and usage within refuges and, consequently, it is not possible to include data in relation to refuges in my Department's monthly reports. Responsibility in relation to domestic violence services rests with Tusla, under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and while my Department would be happy to discuss and facilitate the roll-out of PASS to refuges, the collection and management of data in relation to refuges is a matter for that Agency in the first instance.

Private Rented Accommodation

1994. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on investigations his officials are undertaking in the rental market here; the number of registered landlords in each county; the number of properties per landlord; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37549/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not hold or collate the data referred to by the Deputy in relation to the number of registered landlords in each county and the number of properties per landlord.

The Residential Tenancies Board, through its tenancy registration system, collects information on tenancies and landlords. The Clerk of Dáil Éireann has requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG(P) 05/16 from my Department on 20 September 2016, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) has set up a dedicated email address for this purpose at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie.

Disability Support Services Expenditure

1995. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the fund for assisting persons with disabilities move out of congregated settings; the amount that has been allocated to this fund annually to date in 2017; the amount that has been drawn down from this fund; the amount that has been allocated to the service reform fund for the same purpose; the amount that has been drawn down from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37555/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Ring-fenced funding of €10 million was made available in 2016 under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) to support the provision of accommodation for persons with disabilities transitioning from congregated settings. However, take-up was slow, with €2.1 million being approved that year towards accommodation in counties Donegal, Galway, Kildare and Offaly for 20 people who had moved out of congregated settings.

Given the slow take up in 2016, my Department is continuing to provide funding in 2017 and beyond to support accommodation for persons transitioning from congregated settings.

A "Call for Proposals" issued last month to local authorities requesting them to submit further CAS projects to advance the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities, with a particular emphasis on moving people with disability from a congregated setting into com-

munity based living. My Department will also be following up with the HSE to develop revised guidelines to support increased take-up of available CAS funding for this area of need, in the light of experience to date.

Under the Capital Assistance Scheme, funding of up to 100% is available to approved housing bodies towards the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities, the elderly and homeless. The scheme is administered by the local authorities and a provision of €66 million has been provided for the scheme in 2017.

In relation to the Service Reform Fund, this is dealt with by my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Eligibility

1996. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that local authority tenants who have saved or have access to the full purchase price of their local authority homes but who are in receipt of social welfare are excluded from the tenant purchase scheme; the reason for this rule; his plans to rectify this anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37563/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least 1 year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, it is essential that an applicant's income is of a long-term and sustainable nature. This is necessary to ensure that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Planning Guidelines

1997. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to remove the local needs clause in County Louth; if adjustments will be made to the development plan for County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37564/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the 2013 ECJ Court ruling in the Flemish Decree case, a working group comprising representatives from my Department and planning authorities was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing with a view to ensuring that rural housing policies and objectives contained in county development plans comply with the relevant provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The group has met on three occasions to date.

On conclusion of the Working Group's deliberations, my Department will engage further with the European Commission on proposed changes to be made to the 2005 Guidelines, which I expect to be finalised later this year. The revised Guidelines will be issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, which requires planning authorities, and where appropriate An Bord Pleanála, to have regard to planning guidelines in the performance of their statutory functions under the Planning Acts.

Circular PL 2/2017, which issued in May 2017, advised planning authorities that the 2005 Guidelines remain in place, pending the conclusion of the review processes and that any amendments to rural housing policies in existing development plans should be deferred until advised otherwise by my Department. The Circular is available to view on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/category/planning/sub-type/circular/type/publications?query=PL+2%2F2017&=Apply>.

Fire Stations Upgrade

1998. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the Killarney fire station extension, County Kerry; and the timeframe for completion of same. [37570/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on the current annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

An upgrade of Killarney fire station is provided for in the current five-year programme. Updated project documentation, including a capital appraisal and detailed cost plan, was received in my Department in March 2017, indicating a total project cost of €498,500. In April, my Department approved Kerry County Council to proceed to tender for the proposed works. A firm tender proposal is awaited from the Council, and on receipt of same my Department will progress this project to the next stages with the Council.

The projects in the capital programme are reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the

state of readiness of the projects.

Rent Pressure Zones

1999. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to a report (details supplied), if he will consider changing the methodology used to calculate rent pressure zones and remove meeting the national average rent as part of the formula; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37573/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 amended the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to provide that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone.

For an area to be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended by section 36 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016):

(i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and

(ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Indicative Rent in the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter.

The Act provides that, in confirming whether or not the criteria have been met, the information relating to the area concerned must be determined by the information used to compile the RTB Rent Index quarterly report. This information is based on actual rents of tenancies registered with the RTB as opposed to the Daft.ie figures which reflect asking rents for advertised properties.

On 15 June, the RTB published the Rent Index Report in relation to Quarter 1 2017, which includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating Rent Pressure Zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country. This allows all interested parties to see exactly where their area stands in relation to average rent levels and increases and possible designation. The data from the Rent Index Report relating to County Louth are detailed in the following table.

Local Electoral Area	Quarters > 7%	Average 2017 Q1 (€)
Dundalk Carlingford	6	728.49
Dundalk South	4	926.81
Ardee	5	793.81
Drogheda	6	972.95

While in 4 of the last 6 quarters, rent inflation in Louth has been 7% or greater, the average monthly rent in these areas remains below the average national standardised rent of €987 per month. Therefore, the Local Electoral Areas in Louth do not meet the criteria for designation at this time.

I have no further role or discretion in proposing areas for designation as Rent Pressure Zones or in deciding whether they should be designated. The designation process is independent and based on clear objective criteria and quantifiable evidence. All areas that meet the criteria have now been designated but the Housing Agency continue to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation.

Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones. I expect that the RTB Rent Index data for Quarter 2 of 2017 will be available later this month.

My Department is currently reviewing the Rent Predictability Measure. The provisions have been in place since December 2016 and it is now possible to ascertain their effectiveness and whether any changes need to be made to, for example, the qualifying criteria or the designation process. Where changes are recommended on foot of the review, they will be implemented as a matter of priority.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

2000. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to change the repair and leasing scheme; and when the plans will come into affect. [37621/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was piloted in Carlow and Waterford and has been rolled out nationally since 23 February last. Data gathered during 2017 will inform and guide the development of a national scheme up to 2021. My Department has been working intensively with local authorities and AHBs to develop and implement the scheme. There have been a number of national and local press advertising initiatives, as well as targeted online promotion in an effort to ensure that property owners who can benefit from the scheme are aware of the benefits. The scheme is one of a suite of measures available to local authorities to bring vacant properties back into use.

Based on the first full three months of activity of the scheme, at end June 2017, applications in respect of a total of 535 units have been received by local authorities. Of these, 102 units have been deemed suitable for social housing; a further 138 units have been assessed as unsuitable, and at that time 295 units were in the process of being assessed by local authorities.

To date, 8 Agreements to Lease have been signed - 3 in Carlow and 5 in Waterford. It is expected that the first units will be ready for tenanting in September. Feedback from local authorities indicates that in many cases, properties require extensive repair work and therefore are not suitable for the RLS, have been secured under my Department's Buy and Renew Scheme which facilitates local authorities or approved housing bodies to purchase vacant properties for social housing use.

As part of my ongoing review of Rebuilding Ireland, I am examining all opportunities to accelerate and improve both social housing delivery as well as initiatives to bring more vacant houses back in the use at a faster pace. I expect to conclude the review over the course of the coming weeks and new or revised initiatives will be announced as they are finalised.

Building Regulations Amendments

2001. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase the number of fully accessible toilet facilities with adult changing facilities in public places as per an organisation's (details supplied) campaign; the cost to expand the number of such facilities across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37685/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): New buildings and extensions or material alterations to existing buildings must comply with the legal minimum performance standards set out in the Building Regulations 1997 - 2017. In this context, the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M – Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements that a building must achieve in respect of access.

The requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- new buildings other than dwellings are accessible and usable;
- extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;
- material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;
- certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings where practicable; and
- new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages building owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions where practicable and appropriate.

While the latest iteration of Part M of the Building Regulations initially coincided with the general downturn in economic and construction activity, its positive effects on access and use in the built environment will now be seen more widely as economic recovery takes hold and construction activity continues to gather momentum and moves onto a sustainable footing.

In relation to the Deputy's specific query and the details supplied, while there are no proposals to amend Part M at this point in time, the Building Regulations, including Part M requirements, are subject to ongoing review in the interests of safety and the well-being of persons in the built environment and to ensure that due regard is taken of changes in construction techniques, technological progress and innovation.

Costs are examined in the context of proposed legislative changes, particularly in relation to Building Regulations, and a cost benefit analysis and regulatory impact analysis is carried out on any proposed amendments.

Water Charges Refunds

2002. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost of refunding all those who paid water charges over the past years.

[37740/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The estimated cost, including administrative costs, of refunding all customers of Irish Water that paid domestic water charges totals some €179m.

Homeless Persons Data

2003. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of homeless persons in the Cavan, Monaghan and Meath area; the services available to persons who find themselves homeless in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37741/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

With regard to the number of homeless persons, official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities. Accordingly the range of services available at the local level is primarily a matter for the relevant authorities.

Departmental Expenditure

2004. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount his Department invested in 2016 and to date in 2017 by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37742/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

My Department has a wide and diverse business agenda, covering a broad range of functions, including local authority housing, voluntary housing, estate regeneration, energy efficiency retrofitting, housing grants, rural water schemes, foreshore regulation, fire services, Met Éireann, and the electoral and planning systems. In order to achieve its business objectives, the Department allocates significant resources to an extensive range of organisations, including local authorities, dedicated agencies and other bodies; some allocations, depending on the programmes concerned, are made on a national or other non-county basis.

In these circumstances, the information requested, which potentially relates to all expenditure programmes and county areas, is not readily available in my Department and its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work. If a question is tabled relating to a more specific issue concerning funding from my Department, I will endeavour to provide the information sought.

Services for People with Disabilities

2005. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which his Department has improved services for persons with disabilities in the Cavan, Monaghan and north Meath area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37743/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides funding to local authorities for certain housing-related supports for persons with disabilities. This includes adaptations to both private and social housing, to support adaptations and extensions to meet the needs of people with a disability.

Funding is provided by my Department to local authorities to undertake adaptations and extensions to their own social housing stock to meet the needs of local authority tenants with a disability. In addition, funding to assist people with a disability in private houses is managed by the local authorities through the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. This suite of grants includes the Housing Aid for Older People, the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability and the Mobility Aids Grant. The detailed administration of these grants, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of grants to applicants under the various measures, is the responsibility of the local authorities. The funding allocated to each local authority in respect of these grants, including Cavan, Monaghan and Meath, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordble/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>.

In addition, under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), funding of up to 100% is available to approved housing bodies (AHBs) towards the provision of accommodation for people with a disability, homeless people and elderly people who are social housing qualified. The scheme is administered by the local authorities and a provision of €66 million nationally has been made for it in 2017. Details of approved social housing construction projects in each county, including CAS projects, are set out on the Rebuilding Ireland website at: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>. AHBs can also purchase properties through CAS to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Opportunities to both build and acquire further properties under CAS for people with a disability, and other eligible people, continue to be available under Rebuilding Ireland, where they meet the housing priorities set out by the local authorities.

Question No. 2006 answered with Question No. 1952.

Shared Ownership Scheme

2007. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the legislation in place governing the development of properties which are under shared ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37818/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the powers contained in Section 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992, a local authority may grant a Shared Ownership lease and administer the Shared Ownership loan scheme. The Shared Ownership Scheme was introduced in 1991 and was stood down in 2011. From 1991 to 2010, a total of 16,492 loans were issued under the scheme, of which 3,585 remained at the end of Q1 2017.

Housing Estates

2008. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to address the issue of communal infrastructure, such as septic tanks, in housing estates where in some cases there is a delay in the taking in charge of such estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37874/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The taking-in-charge of residential developments is the responsibility of local authorities. My Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016 to support and accelerate overall national action on the taking-in-charge process, including estates with developer provided water services infrastructure.

The NTICI was intended to develop better knowledge and systems to support the taking-in-charge of further estates over time. In relation to wastewater infrastructure, enforcement of planning conditions relating to maintenance in progressing the taking-in-charge process is frequently part of a series of steps that require to be undertaken to ensure such infrastructure is in a sufficiently completed and properly functioning condition to facilitate the taking-in-charge process.

A report on the 2016 NTICI Programme is currently being finalised by my Department and I expect to be in a position to publish the report shortly. The report will include findings and recommendations on sustaining progress on the taking-in-charge issue, including in respect of the resolution of developer provided water services infrastructure in housing estates.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

2009. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of applications received to date in 2017 for the repair and lease scheme in each county since the inception of the scheme; the number of successful applications in each county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37877/17]

2036. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of properties that have become available under the repair and leasing scheme for each local authority; the number of additional properties that will be made available by each local authority by the end of 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38214/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2009 and 2036 together.

The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) was piloted in Carlow and Waterford and has been rolled out nationally since 23 February last. Data gathered during 2017 will inform and guide the development of a national scheme up to 2021. My Department has been working intensively with local authorities and AHBs to develop and implement the scheme and individual targets have been set for local authorities for 2017. There have been a number of national and local press advertising initiatives, as well as targeted online promotion in effort to ensure that properties owners who can benefit from the scheme are aware of the benefits. The scheme is one of a suite of measures available to local authorities to bring vacant properties back into use.

Based on the first full three months of activity of the scheme, at end June 2017, applications in respect of a total of 535 units have been received by local authorities. Of these, 102 units

have been deemed suitable for social housing; a further 138 units have been assessed as unsuitable and at that time, 295 units were in the process of being assessed by local authorities. The data requested is set out in the following table.

The process of finalising units is now underway and 8 Agreements to Lease have been signed to date - 3 in Carlow and 5 in Waterford. It is expected that the first units will be ready for tenanting later in September.

Feedback from local authorities indicates that in many cases properties requiring extensive repair work and therefore not suitable for the RLS, have been secured under the Buy and Renew Scheme which facilitates local authorities or approved housing bodies to purchase vacant properties for social housing use.

As part of my ongoing review of Rebuilding Ireland, I am examining all opportunities to accelerate and improve both social housing delivery as well as initiatives to bring more vacant houses back in the use at a faster pace. I am currently finalising the outcomes of that review.

LA	Number of applications received	Properties deemed SUITABLE	Properties deemed UNSUITABLE
Carlow	17	0	0
Cavan	16	4	10
Clare	4	0	1
Cork City	7	5	2
Cork County	44	19	8
DLR	0	0	0
Donegal	29	0	6
Dublin City	8	7	1
Fingal	5	0	5
Galway City	1	1	0
Galway County	44	6	22
Kerry	85	0	21
Kildare	6	5	1
Kilkenny	12	7	5
Laois	2	0	0
Leitrim	3	0	1
Limerick	32	15	3
Longford	12	0	4
Louth	12	0	0
Mayo	2	1	0
Meath	6	0	1
Monaghan	6	1	5
Offaly	5	5	0
Roscommon	30	2	17
Sligo	2	0	2
SDCC	0	0	0
Tipperary	26	19	4
Waterford	93	0	13
Westmeath	16	0	2

Wexford	7	4	3
Wicklow	3	1	1
	535	102	138

Local Government Reform

2010. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will report on the implementation of the programme for Government commitments in respect of local government reform, in particular the promised report to Government and the Houses of the Oireachtas by mid-2017 on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability; if he will further report on the possible devolution of new powers to local authorities and the establishment of town and borough councils. [37892/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of requirements in relation to local government reform. This involves the submission of a report to Government and the Oireachtas on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability, and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy. The Programme also references some specific issues to be considered such as the concept of directly elected mayors in cities, devolution of new powers to local authorities, reducing the size of local electoral areas, and town council status.

Work on the report is at an advanced stage, and I hope to be in a position to have it available for consideration by Government in the coming weeks.

Commercial Rates

2011. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for legislation governing the rates structure to enable sectors of society (details supplied) to obtain rate waivers under specific conditions and particularly in respect of weather related damage. [37942/17]

2017. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to modernise and consolidate legislation governing commercial rates; the status of the drafting of the Rates Bill approved by Government on 11 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38082/17]

2046. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the new commercial rates Bill; his plans for helping small and struggling businesses that are finding it impossible at present to pay their commercial rates bill under the present system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38397/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2011, 2017 and 2046 together.

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each

local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function. Rates income is a very important contribution to the cost of services provided by local authorities such as roads, public lighting, development control, parks and open spaces. Locally elected members adopt the annual rate on valuation they consider necessary in order to provide the required services.

The Commissioner of Valuation, who has responsibility for valuation matters, is conducting a programme of revaluation of all commercial and industrial properties throughout the State. The purpose of the revaluation process is to provide for more consistent and up-to-date valuations for rating purposes and to assist in providing a more equitable distribution of valuations across those liable to pay rates. The Valuation Office comes under the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality.

The legislative basis for the levying of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century. Many of the provisions are outdated and not suitable for business trends in the modern era. My Department has developed legislative proposals to modernise and consolidate the legislation governing commercial rates. Among the measures included in the General Scheme of the Bill are provisions to allow a local authority to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support specific national and local policy objectives. The Government approved the drafting of a Rates Bill at its meeting on 11 April 2017. These proposals will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny in due course.

The draft legislation does not provide for rates waivers for weather related issues encountered by small businesses. In instances where small businesses have difficulties arising from weather related damage, other supports have been made available by the Government. Most recently in Donegal, the Government introduced a Humanitarian Support Scheme to assist small businesses and community, voluntary and sporting bodies. This scheme is funded by the Department of Defence and administered by the Irish Red Cross.

Brexit Staff

2012. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37995/17]

2013. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38011/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2012 and 2013 together.

Matters in relation to Brexit are managed by the business unit responsible for the coordination of EU and international business in my Department, with input from relevant line sections and experts across the organisation, as necessary. The relevant team, in the Assistant Secretary led Corporate and Business Support Division, is headed by a senior official at Principal Officer level and, while there are no staff deployed full-time to the issue, three people are involved directly at various times along with input from a larger number of staff across my Department as required. Brexit-related matters are also kept under regular review by my Department's Management Board. Apart from the normal staff and overhead costs, which have not been

quantified to date, no specific additional funding has been allocated in my Department for Brexit-related matters at this point in time.

Brexit is a Government-wide issue and my Department has been working closely with other Departments on the preparations to date and will continue to do so during the negotiation period.

Construction Costs

2014. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38027/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department has a team of Technical Advisers who monitor, on an ongoing basis, construction projects for which we are the sanctioning authority. The last 18 months has seen much increased activity in this area with many project tender returns assisting towards the development of a reliable database in respect of housing construction projects in which my Department is involved. The technical team's role in monitoring of these construction projects includes consideration of tender inflation. Our recent tender activity indicates that inflation is broadly in line with the Tender Price Index published by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland; which is in the region of 8-10% over the timeframe to which the query relates.

Brexit Issues

2015. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has studied the implications of Brexit regarding inward migration from the UK and EU and the additional demand this will impose on the private rented residential sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38080/17]

2070. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38889/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2015 and 2070 together.

The extent to which Brexit will impact on the private rented residential sector or indeed on the housing market generally, is uncertain at this point in time as it will be determined at least in part by the nature of the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

In May 2017, my Department and the Economic and Social Research Institute commenced a three-year programme of collaborative research. The output of the research programme will be a series of published papers concerning housing economics and related topics. Part of this programme will include work on estimating housing demand, including examining the implications for the housing market of changes in population levels which might arise over the medium term. Net migration, whether due to Brexit or other factors, will be one of the variables con-

sidered. The first outputs from the programme in relation to estimating medium to long-term housing demand are expected in mid-2018.

I continue to work with stakeholders in implementing the Rebuilding Ireland programme and will keep the potential housing-related impacts of Brexit under review as the negotiations unfold.

Planning Issues

2016. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his officials completed the trial densification project at a location (details supplied) in the Dublin City Council area; the conclusions drawn from the densification project and its viability for being rolled out nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38081/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): While I am aware of the project referred to, my Department is not directly involved in it.

Government policy acknowledges the benefits of more compact development at urban locations proximate to public transport and other local services, as outlined under statutory Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines issued by the Minister in 2009 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Urban planning and development policy also emphasises that particular care must be taken in the formulation of infill development proposals within established communities whose character is established by their density or architectural form. Any specific project must go through the relevant local planning process.

Our planning system provides a robust and well proven mechanism to assess such development proposals in striking an appropriate balance between the reasonable protection of the amenities and privacy of adjoining dwellings, the protection of established character and the need to enable reasonable infill proposals to meet our society's housing requirements.

Question No. 2017 answered with Question No. 2011.

Question No. 2018 answered with Question No. 1952.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

2019. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress his Department has made along with the National Development Finance Agency on allowing larger institutional private investors to become involved in financing social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38084/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHBs and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements. These provide that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term time period, typically 20 years. In return, the housing unit is made available for social housing purposes.

Changes are now being proposed to this scheme in order to facilitate larger institutional private investors to become involved in the financing of social housing.

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) is acting as financial advisor to my Department in this work and has undertaken market engagement in the development of the scheme. The new arrangements arising from this process are being tested to ensure that there is no negative impact arising from how they are viewed and treated in respect of the State's General Government Balance. As part of this process, the proposed changes have been examined by Eurostat. Work on the scheme is well advanced, with details expected to be announced later this year.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

2020. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons and families assisted under the emergency accommodation scheme in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38085/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Funding in respect of homeless services is provided on a regional basis. During 2016, my Department recouped over €68.6 million to the Dublin Region housing authorities, while payments exceeding €23.7 million have been recouped to date in 2017.

With regard to the number of homeless persons, official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities. The specific data sought in the Question is not available in my Department, and is a matter for the relevant housing authority.

Rent Pressure Zones

2021. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the recent finding by an organisation (details supplied) that eight out of ten landlords wrongly issued rent increases to tenants in rent pressure zones in cases on which it adjudicated; the steps he will take to ensure more compliance by landlords with the new legislation. [38091/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is currently conducting a review of the Rent Predictability Measure and, on the basis of the RTB rent data and of the recently conducted consultation on the operation of the Rent Pressure Zones, is examining whether there is avoidance, either through the unjustified use of the exemptions or the introduction of extra charges by landlords or the implementation of increases beyond those allowed under the legislation and whether new approaches to ensuring compliance are necessary. Where policy and/or legislative changes are recommended on foot of the review, they will be implemented as a matter of priority.

Approved Housing Bodies

2022. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing and/or affordable housing units built or purchased by each of the approved housing bodies (details supplied) in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38135/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) are making an important contribution to social housing delivery as envisaged in Rebuilding Ireland. My Department and local authorities administer a number of funding programmes to assist AHBs with the cost of building, buying and leasing new social houses. All funding is conditional on the properties being made available to households on local authority waiting lists.

Under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), funding of up to 100% is available to AHBs towards the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities, the elderly and homeless who are social housing qualified. The funding is provided by way of a local authority loan to the AHB with funding to cover the loan amount being drawn down by the local authority from my Department. A provision of €66 million has been provided nationally for the scheme in 2017. As the scheme is administered by the local authorities, details relating to the AHBs providing the accommodation and the categories of persons involved would be available from the authorities rather than my Department.

Under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), my Department, together with local authorities, can support AHBs to construct, purchase or lease housing units and make them available for social housing. The housing units are secured under long-term leases/ availability arrangements between local authorities and AHBs, the cost of which is recouped to local authorities by my Department. The Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) funding is capital support provided to AHBs by local authorities, to assist with the financing of the construction or acquisition of units that will be provided to household on local authority waiting lists. CALF is a low interest loan to allow them access to early working capital (up to 30% of the relevant costs) for the purchase, construction or refurbishment of properties. Low interest rate borrowings are available to AHBs from the Housing Finance Agency and other private finance sources to support the financing of the balance. A provision of €43 million has been provided for the scheme in 2017. The capital advance is repayable by the AHB to the local authority at the end of a payment and availability agreement, usually 30 years. All proposals for CALF are submitted to the Department by AHBs for review and to ensure that the project complies with the terms of the CALF and that there are sufficient funds available.

In addition, AHBs may fund the construction or acquisition of properties which are secured for social housing by local authorities using their own reserves. Details of such activity by individual AHBs are not collated by my Department.

Details of the annual social housing output in each of the years 2014, 2015, and 2016 as well as the specific output under each of the funding programme are available on my Department's website at the following link - <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Public Services Card

2023. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he, or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department, plans to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public

services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38151/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department, generally, does not provide services or payments directly to the public; services tend instead to be provided to the public through our agencies or through the local authorities. I do not currently have any plans to make the use of the Public Services Card by the public mandatory for the receipt of services directly from my Department.

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact details for each agency are listed in the following table.

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie.
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2024. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the houses built as part of the State fund established to build social and affordable housing, including the location of each house, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38166/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, published in July 2016, sets out the Government's approach to addressing the current challenges in the housing sector. It is focused on increasing supply across all tenures and, in respect of social housing, the target is to deliver 47,000 housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisition and leasing over the period 2016 to 2021. This activity is being supported through a significantly increased investment programme of €5.35 billion. Alongside this is an accelerated roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme which over the lifetime of the Plan is targeted to meet the needs of more than 83,000 households.

While still at an early stage of implementation, there is already strong evidence that the focus on increasing and accelerating housing supply in Rebuilding Ireland is achieving results. In 2016, the housing needs of over 19,000 households were met through a range of housing programmes, supported by expenditure of over €935 million. A further €1.3 billion has been provided for 2017 to support the accelerated delivery of social housing and the achievement of this year's target to meet the housing needs of over 21,000 households.

A comprehensive status list of social housing schemes for all local authority areas, can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>. This status report covers the period up to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017 and lists 607 approved social housing construction projects, their locations and also includes a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered during 2016 and to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017, it also shows those progressing through planning, design and

construction. Details in respect of Quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

These 607 projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by approved housing bodies (AHBs). The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and AHBs concerned, in the first instance.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and AHBs, updated details of which will be published on a regular basis. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard. Furthermore, last week I announced that from 2018, the budget for social housing is being reorientated away from acquisitions and into direct build programmes for local authorities and AHBs. As a result, the current target for 2018 of c.3,000 newly built homes will increase by almost 30% to c.3800. When combined with homes to be delivered through Part V, and including old social housing stock that is being refurbished and returned to use, some 5,000 new social housing homes will be delivered in 2018.

As a result of this policy shift, this trend will continue across the current capital plan so that more than 20,000 new social housing homes will be built directly by local authorities and approved housing bodies over the lifetime of the capital plan.

The Government is committed to further increasing the number of new homes which will be built as part of the Social Housing Build Programme. Discussions are ongoing with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and decisions on additional funding for social housing purposes will be finalised in the context of Budget 2018.

Question No. 2025 answered with Question No. 1975.

Fire Safety

2026. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that every high rise and multi-unit development has been appropriately inspected for fire safety and is fully in compliance with all fire safety regulations, in view of the Grenfell fire disaster; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38186/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Section 18(2) of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003, there is a standing responsibility for fire safety in buildings of all kinds to which this legislation applies on the “person having control” of the premises. In addition, the design and construction of buildings is regulated under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014 and the primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations, including fire safety, rests with the designers, builders and owners of buildings.

Auditing and enforcement of the provisions of the Fire Services Act and Building Regulations is a function of the 31 local authorities, who have a suite of enabling and enforcement powers under both legislative codes.

In response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, on 27 June 2017, I tasked the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management in my Department with co-ordinating a high-level Task Force to lead Ireland’s re-appraisal of

fire safety. The Task Force was requested to oversee and report on a number of initial steps and to consider urgently any potential life safety issues arising and appropriate responses. The Task Force is reviewing and re-appraising existing arrangements and systems for fire safety and related issues which impact on fire safety in Ireland. As it carries out its work, the Task Force will continue to take into account information and developments arising in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire.

In addition to establishing the Task Force, I requested that a number of initial actions be taken, including reviews of fire safety in social housing and fire safety in medium and high rise buildings. The Task Force is preparing an initial report for me by the end of September 2017, with a further report setting out further proposals for my consideration in 2018.

Local authorities were requested to review fire safety in the multi-storey social housing sector. Initial research undertaken in response has not identified any residential buildings in Ireland directly comparable, or of a similar scale, to Grenfell Tower. The responses from all 31 local authorities indicated that there are 1,250 multi storey social housing buildings in Ireland, containing 17,060 flats. Initial assessments of fire safety features in these buildings indicated a high level of presence of appropriate fire safety features and action has been initiated by the local authorities to rectify specific identified concerns.

Local authorities have confirmed also that they commenced a process of engagement with management companies of privately-owned multi-storey buildings where social housing is being provided in relation to the fire safety responsibilities of those companies as the ‘person having control’ of the building.

The Task Force Working Group on Social Housing will continue to analyse the returns received and identify issues which merit further consideration or action.

Local authorities were also requested to carry out a preliminary survey to identify buildings of more than six storeys, or more than 18m in height, fitted with external cladding or rain screen systems, with or without insulation, that may be a cause for concern in respect of potential for rapid fire spread, and to consider whether use of the power to require a fire safety assessment is warranted, in respect of identified buildings. This request covered residential accommodation and other buildings. Residential buildings include flats or maisonettes, residential institutional uses (hospitals, nursing homes, homes for old people or children, schools or other similar establishments providing accommodation) and other residential uses (including hotels, hostels, guest buildings, residential colleges, halls of residence).

A total of 847 such medium to high rise buildings have been identified in these categories, including 372 residential and 475 ‘other’ uses. Of these, the presence of cladding has been noted in 86 residential and 160 non-residential buildings. For 86 residential buildings and 111 non-residential buildings, local authorities have decided to request the persons having control over the building to carry out a fire safety assessment (under section 18(6)(a) of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 & 2003) on buildings with cladding systems and concealed spaces (cavities) in the external wall construction and its potential impact on fire safety in the building.

As the work of the Fire Safety Task Force progresses, the issue of reviewing buildings less than 18m in height will be considered. The 18m height threshold for initial consideration was chosen as this is the height at which specific additional fire safety requirements are triggered in building regulations. This is also seen as the maximum height at which external fire-fighting is possible.

I will consider all issues emerging, including regulatory arrangements, in line with developments and the reports of the Task Force and, particularly, as further information becomes avail-

able in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

2027. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons in each local authority in receipt of HAP; the number in receipt of an enhanced HAP or top-up payment, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38205/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, a tenant sources their own accommodation, the tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is governed by the Residential Tenancy Act 2004 (as amended). The Government increased the maximum rent limits available under the HAP and Rent Supplement schemes across the country with effect from 1 July 2016. Furthermore, additional flexibility above the existing HAP rent limits was made available to all HAP local authorities from the same date.

Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis.

From data that is available, at the end of Q2 2017, 17.8% of the total number of households being supported by HAP were benefiting from the additional flexibility that was provided to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limits. When the additional discretion available to homeless households in the Dublin Region is removed, 12.6% of households nationally were benefiting from the additional flexibility that was provided to local authorities to exceed the maximum rent limits. The following table identifies the number of households being supported by HAP where additional flexibility was utilised by local authority area.

Local Authority Area	Number of HAP supported households at end of Q2 2017	Number of HAP supported households where additional flexibility was utilised by LA	%
Carlow County Council	515	36	7%
Cavan County Council	60	1	1.7%
Clare County Council	1,113	47	4.2%
Cork City Council	1,290	413	32%
Cork County Council	2,127	157	7.4%
Donegal County Council	1,540	3	0.2%
Dublin City Council*	375	95	25.3%

Local Authority Area	Number of HAP supported households at end of Q2 2017	Number of HAP supported households where additional flexibility was utilised by LA	%
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council*	46	37	80.4%
Fingal County Council*	121	49	40.5%
Galway City Council	645	305	47.3%
Galway County Council	570	45	7.9%
Kerry County Council	194	27	13.9%
Kildare County Council	1,128	432	38.3%
Kilkenny County Council	800	14	1.8%
Laois County Council	88	3	3.4%
Leitrim County Council	42	-	0.0%
Limerick City & County Council	1,767	28	1.6%
Longford County Council	60	-	0.0%
Louth County Council	1,568	68	4.3%
Mayo County Council	624	408	65.4%
Meath County Council	856	315	36.8%
Monaghan County Council	360	12	3.3%
Offaly County Council	465	3	0.6%
Roscommon County Council	74	-	0.0%
Sligo County Council	347	2	0.6%
South Dublin County Council*	1,783	13	0.7%
Tipperary County Council	1,407	150	10.7%
Waterford City & County Council	1,339	56	4.2%

Local Authority Area	Number of HAP supported households at end of Q2 2017	Number of HAP supported households where additional flexibility was utilised by LA	%
Westmeath County Council	148	10	6.8%
Wexford County Council	192	8	4.2%
Wicklow County Council	164	10	6.1%
Total (Excl DRHE)	21,808	2,746	12.6%
*DRHE	1,428	1,391	97%
**Grand Total (including DRHE)	23,236	4,137	17.8%

*In Dublin City Council, DLR, Fingal and South Dublin County Councils, eligible homeless households are assisted under the Homeless HAP scheme operated by the DRHE, under which additional discretion is available in recognition of the difficulty that can exist in housing homeless households. These homeless HAP numbers are not included in the HAP numbers identified under each of these Dublin LA areas in the table above.

**Tenancy numbers reflected above show all HAP tenancies set up at end Q.2 2017 where the rent was agreed. A further 607 HAP tenancies were set up at this point, but were awaiting final rent agreement.

More than 26,000 households are currently in receipt of HAP support. A breakdown by the number of households supported by HAP, including the number of Rent Supplement transfers in each local authority area for 2016 and for Q2 2017, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

2028. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when construction work on each site will commence and when homes on each site will be available in view of the fact that it is now almost two years since the Government's original announcement to provide 520 new social housing homes by means of a PPP mechanism across six sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38206/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing PPP Programme involves an investment with a capital value of €300 million. It is to deliver 1,500 social housing units in total, via three bundles. The first bundle comprises six PPP sites, providing for over 500 units in the Greater Dublin Area.

Each individual bundle of sites takes an estimated 37-48 months to deliver in total, includ-

ing planning, procurement and construction. It is expected that construction would commence in 2018 on the first sites, with units becoming available from 2019.

The time taken to put the procurement and contractual arrangements in place is necessary in order to appropriately structure the mechanism to ensure that the quality of the units delivered and the management agreements protect the interests of tenants and taxpayers. The timescale for the construction period is in line with traditional delivery.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

2029. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding that has been drawn down to date further to the announcement of the local infrastructure housing activation fund; the particular lands and developments this funding relates to; the funding he expects to be drawn down in the remainder of 2017; the particular lands and developments this relates to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38207/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 28th March 2017, funding was announced for 34 projects under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF). The total cost of these projects is €226.5 million, of which €169.7 million would be funded from the Exchequer under LIHAF with local authorities funding the remaining €56.8 million.

No drawdown of funding can occur until grant agreements between my Department and local authorities have been signed.

Local authorities are continuing to work with developers with a view to finalising agreements in relation to LIHAF. My Department has informed local authorities that the final deadline for the receipt of any outstanding documentation, including details of the local agreements between local authorities and developers, is 15th September. I intend to review all documentation relating to each of the projects considered for formal approval with the aim of proceeding to signing Grant Agreements with Local Authorities as soon as possible thereafter. This will enable drawdown of funding to begin later this year.

The full list of approved projects, together with brief descriptions and the projected housing yield for each site, is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/local-infrastructure-housing-activation-fund-approved-projects>.

Private Rented Accommodation Deposits

2030. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to amend legislation to ensure that the rate of deposits sought by landlords is no more than one month's rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38208/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 provides for, among other things, the establishment of a tenancy deposit protection scheme to be operated by the Residential Tenancies Board.

The Government is fully committed to the principle of ensuring effective protection of deposits. However, I am examining the current legislative provisions to take account of the

changed circumstances since the scheme was first envisaged and determine what modifications and improvements should be made to ensure that the scheme, when introduced, can operate effectively and efficiently.

I am aware of the issue of some landlords charging more than one month's deposit which has been raised on a number of occasions recently. The setting in legislation of a limit on the level of deposit that a landlord may require is also being considered in the context of the examination of the deposit protection scheme mentioned above.

Rental Sector Strategy

2031. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the expert group to develop plans for a cost rental model for housing has been established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38209/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, noted that the Programme for a Partnership Government contains a commitment to develop a "cost rental" option, taking account of work already completed in this area, including by the National Economic and Social Council and others.

In line with this commitment, Action 12 of the Strategy commits my Department to lead an Expert Group to develop a cost rental model for the Irish rental sector. This Group will address issues such as funding mechanisms, the need to grow the necessary institutional capacity, particularly within the AHB and not-for-profit sector (whether through mergers, new entrants or strategic partnerships), rent levels, the households to be targeted and the appropriate regulation mechanisms.

The Expert Group will assess the benefits that a larger and more developed not-for-profit segment would bring to the rental sector and the housing system, by increasing supply of rental accommodation for low to middle-income households and ensuring new capacity is developed and attracted into Ireland. The Group will also consider various proposals advanced in this regard, including the proposal to establish a semi-State company to progress the cost rental model, in the course of its work.

Subsequent to the conclusion of the focused review of Rebuilding Ireland, it is my intention to establish this Expert Group in the coming weeks and the development of a proposal regarding its membership and terms of reference is currently being finalised in my Department.

Vacant Sites Levy

2032. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to raise the 3% rate of the vacant site levy in view of the limited housing construction under way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38210/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced a new measure, the vacant site levy, which is aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under-utilised sites in urban areas. Under the Act, planning authorities are required to establish a register of vacant sites in their areas, beginning on 1 January 2017, and to issue annual notices to owners of vacant sites by 1 June 2018 in respect of vacant sites on the register on 1 January 2018. The levy will be applied

by planning authorities, commencing on 1 January 2019 in respect of sites which were vacant and on the vacant site register during the year 2018 and will subsequently be applied on an annual basis thereafter, as long as a site remains on the vacant site register in the preceding year.

Planning authorities are empowered to apply an annual vacant site levy of 3% of the market value of vacant sites exceeding 0.5 hectares in area - with reduced or zero rates of levy applying in specific circumstances – which, in the planning authority’s opinion, were vacant or idle in the preceding year, in areas identified by the planning authority in its development plan or local area plan for residential or regeneration development. The 3% rate of vacant site levy is consistent with the rate applied to derelict sites under the Derelict Sites Act 1990.

All levies due on an individual site will remain a charge on the land concerned until all outstanding levies due are paid. Accordingly, under the vacant site levy provisions, there will be a cumulative effect associated with not activating a site for development purposes for each year that a site remains vacant or idle.

As the Deputy will be aware, I have initiated a focused review of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, with a particular focus on strengthening the measures already in place, including for example the vacant site levy, as well as identifying new initiatives that will add value and raise ambition across all five Pillars of the Action Plan, including measures that seek to bring land and property into active use for housing purposes. Following detailed consideration of the issues, in close consultation with other relevant Government colleagues, I anticipate that details of proposed actions arising from the review will be finalised in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Housing Data

2033. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of rapid build houses which have been built to date; the additional number expected to be completed by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38211/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following the completion of 22 rapid build houses in Poppintree in 2016, an additional 21 houses have now been completed and occupied in St. Helena’s Drive, Finglas. Details of other schemes due for completion in 2017 and 2018 are as follows:

Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot	24 homes, scheduled for completion and allocation in September 2017
Mourne Road, Drimnagh	29 homes, scheduled for completion and allocation in September 2017
St. Helena’s, Finglas	21 homes allocated, 18 remaining on the site are scheduled for completion and allocation in September 2017
Belcamp, Dublin, 17	38 homes, scheduled for completion and allocation September 2017
Wellview, Mulhuddart	20 homes, scheduled for completion and allocation in November / December 2017
Woodbank, Rathvilly	17 homes, scheduled for completion and allocation end 2017/early 2018

Cherry Orchard, Ballyfermot	53 homes, scheduled for completion and allocation end 2017/early 2018
St. Aidan's, Brookfield	71 homes, scheduled for delivery Q2 2018 and Q3 2018
Pinewood, Balbriggan	25 homes, scheduled for delivery Q1 2018
George's Place, Dun Laoghaire	12 homes, scheduled for delivery in early 2018
Avondale, Mulhuddart, Fingal	44 homes (20 units scheduled for delivery in Q2 2018 & 24 in Q 3 2018)
Killinenny Road, Firhouse, South Dublin	24 homes scheduled for delivery in Q3 2018
St Cuthberts, Clondalkin, South Dublin	59 homes scheduled for delivery in Q4 2018
Hansfield, Dublin 15	36 homes, outline design and costs currently being prepared

My Department has recently asked all Local Authorities to review the social housing projects in their areas and in the interest of achieving earliest delivery, they have been requested to consider their suitability for Design and Build contracts under the Framework set up by the Office Of Government Procurement. They are being asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are amenable to early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

Vacant Properties

2034. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects to publish the full vacant house re-use strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38212/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is presently engaging in consultations with a number of other Government Departments and agencies in relation to vacancy issues within the wider review of Rebuilding Ireland. Subject to the outcome of these discussions, I expect to be in a position to complete this work next month.

Local Authority Housing Data

2035. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of new social houses constructed by each local authority to date in 2017; the additional number of social houses that will be completed by each local authority by the end of 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38213/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information is currently being finalised in respect of quarter one of 2017 and will be published shortly, with information on quarter two 2017 to follow thereafter.

A comprehensive status list of social housing schemes for all local authority areas can be

accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/> .

This status report covers the period up to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017 and lists 607 approved social housing construction projects, their locations and also includes a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered during 2016 and to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017, it also shows those progressing through planning, design and construction. Details in respect of Quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

These 607 projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by Approved Housing Bodies. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and AHBs concerned, in the first instance. However, within the overall 21,000 social housing solutions targeted for delivery this year, some 4,500 of these will be delivered through new builds/acquisitions and a significant proportion of these will involve new construction.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and AHBs, details of which will be included in the next quarterly report under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Question No. 2036 answered with Question No. 2009.

Rental Sector

2037. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions he has taken and the specific actions he plans to take to enforce breaches of housing laws in cases in which landlords are favouring short-term tourist rentals over long-term tenancy lets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38215/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Action 18 of the Strategy for the Rental Sector, my Department has established a Working Group of all the major public stakeholders with a policy interest in Short-Term Letting. Three meetings of the Working Group have been held to date and work is progressing well.

The proposals under consideration are aimed at facilitating the short-term letting of accommodation within permanent residences – homesharing – while protecting the existing stock of residential property in areas of high demand, safeguarding neighbourhood amenity and consumer protection and generating revenue to address negative externalities of short-term letting.

The Working Group is developing guidance for issue to local authorities when considering planning applications relating to short-term lettings and will also report to me later this year on the appropriate regulatory approach for short-term tourism-related lettings and the identification of any necessary amendments to existing legislation required to give effect to such regulation.

Local Authority Boundaries Review

2038. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to influence the Mackinnon report on the restructuring of Cork County Coun-

cil in favour of stability and economic harmony for its ratepayers and community as a whole. [38224/17]

2052. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will intervene and act on section 13.2.27 of the Mackinnon report into the proposed boundary extension of Cork City Council (details supplied); his views on whether the oversight group has seen its role as purely one of implementation of the report rather than to seek a mutual agreement between the two local authorities; his further views on whether negotiations are required regarding the scope of the boundary; and his further views on whether it is his duty to take into account the views of those affected by the proposals of the report. [38576/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2038 and 2052 together.

The Cork Local Government Implementation Oversight Group has been established to oversee arrangements for the alteration of the boundary between the respective areas of jurisdiction of Cork City Council and Cork County Council, in light of the recommendation in the report of the Cork Expert Advisory Group.

The group’s first task is to present a detailed Implementation Plan by end September 2017, engaging with the two local authorities, with a view to developing detailed and comprehensive proposals for the boundary alteration and to ultimately oversee the implementation of agreed recommendations.

At this stage it is a matter for the Oversight Group to progress its work, the output from which I will consider in due course.

Question No. 2039 answered with Question No. 1949.

Building Regulations Application

2040. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied with the arrangements for supervision of erectors and installers of timber frame construction systems in view of the many faults which have been exposed to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38260/17]

2041. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he is satisfied that National Standards Authority of Ireland, NSAI, renews agrément certificate 04/0198 in view of the frequency of faults found on sites; if he will direct the NSAI to delete this agrément certificate from their website and withdraw approval of the certificate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38261/17]

2042. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact of the many defects found in buildings for which the fire safety certificate was based on the specifications set out in agrément certificate 04/0198; if he will request the various building control authorities to conduct tests to ensure compliance with the certificates and pursue enforcement of the building regulations by the provider of the timber frame systems in cases in which defective works are discovered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38262/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2040 to 2042, inclusive, together.

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is an autonomous body under the aegis of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The process of Agrément certification applies to those products and processes which do not fall within the scope of existing construction standards, either because they are innovative or because they deviate from established norms.

NSAI Agrément assesses, specifies testing, and where appropriate, issues Agrément certificates confirming that new building products, materials, techniques and equipment are safe and fit for purpose in accordance with the Irish Building Regulations and with the terms of the certificate. NSAI is the national certification authority providing, inter alia, a certification service to enable businesses demonstrate that Irish goods and services conform to applicable standards.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts.

The minimum performance requirements that a building must achieve are set out in the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations in 12 parts classified A to M. Under Part D, Materials and Workmanship, there is an overarching requirement that all works should be carried out using proper materials, “which are fit for the use for which they are intended and for the conditions in which they are to be used” to ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements as prescribed.

Where innovative products are used, third party certification, such as Agrément Certification, is a means of demonstrating how products or systems can meet the requirements of the building regulations, including Part B, Fire Safety. Care should be taken to read the terms and conditions of such certification and ensure that the content of the certification is strictly adhered to during construction, in conjunction with the Fire Safety Certificate where relevant.

In response to the building failures that have emerged over the past decade, my Department introduced the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 9 of 2014), which require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction by registered construction professionals and builders, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates. A Certificate of Compliance on Completion is jointly signed by the builder and the assigned certifier. In effect, the statutory Certificate of Compliance on Completion certifies that a building is compliant with all relevant requirements of the Building Regulations.

Finally, in relation to timber frame construction, Irish Standard 440: 2009/A1:2014 Timber Frame Construction, Dwellings and other Buildings (I.S. 440) specifies requirements for materials, design, manufacture, construction details, site work and quality control for platform timber frame construction. It requires that the responsibilities for the tasks involved in the planning, structural design, site erection and inspection be agreed and recorded prior to the commencement of each project. I.S. 440 also gives specific details relating to fire; including the construction of separating walls, horizontal and vertical fire stopping, cavity barriers and detailed fire stopping junctions for walls and floors and service penetrations. Manufacturers of timber frame buildings are assessed under an approval scheme operated by NSAI for compliance with I.S. 440 requirements including Factory Production Control (FPC) and a register of compliant manufacturers is available on the NSAI website.

The developments and reforms outlined above have brought an order and discipline in relation to compliance on all construction projects.

Planning Investigations

2043. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a report with his Department into allegations of planning irregularities in County Donegal; if the report has been finalised and presented to him; the date on which he plans to publish the report; the action he will take both in County Donegal and generally as a result of the findings of the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38269/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Senior Counsel has completed his review of certain planning matters in respect of Donegal County Council and a report was submitted to my Department on 12 June 2017.

My Department is currently reviewing and assessing the contents of the report with the aim of preparing a submission for my consideration as soon as possible. Legal advice has recently been received in relation to the matter of publication. Further legal advice has been requested in relation to the contents of the report. Once the relevant submission and legal advices have been considered, I will be in a position to make a decision on publication and to outline my response to the Report.

Irish Water Funding

2044. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the source of the revenue being used to refund Irish Water customers. [38285/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): It is anticipated that funding to refund water charges will be provided by the Exchequer through Voted expenditure.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

2045. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the annual percentage of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017 in tabular form. [38365/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies directly to members of the Oireachtas. The contact email address for each agency is as below:

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie.
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie

Question No. 2046 answered with Question No. 2011.

Question Heading for question(s) 2047,2048,2049,2050

2047. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of households in receipt of housing assistance payment by county. [38495/17]

2048. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of children in each household in receipt of housing assistance payment, in tabular form. [38496/17]

2049. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons that applied for the housing assistance payment in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by county. [38497/17]

2050. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated to each county for housing assistance payment in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [38498/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2047 to 2050, inclusive, together.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 26,000 households having their housing needs met via HAP and some 18,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of monthly HAP payments.

A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP in each local authority area at the end of Quarter 2 2017 is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision> .

In relation to the number of children in each household in receipt of HAP, my Department does not collate this data; however, a summary of the household classes supported by the HAP scheme at end of Quarter 2 2017 is set out below:

- Single/ Single Sharing - 31%
- Couple/ Couple Sharing - 4%
- Lone Parent with Children - 40%
- Couple with Children - 25%

HAP is available to any household that has been assessed as eligible for social housing support in accordance with the statutory definitions. The Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2016 publication brings together information provided by local authorities on households in their functional area qualified for social housing support whose social housing need is not being met. This report shows that 91,600 households were assessed as qualified for housing support as on 21 September 2016; the report is available at the following weblink: http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/summary_of_social_housing_assessments_2016.pdf .

Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective HAP transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in

their administrative

areas but rather recoups all landlord cost via the HAP SSC.

The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. The Exchequer outturn for the HAP scheme in 2014 to 2016 is as follows:

Year	Outturn€M
2014	0.394
2015	15.64
2016	57.69

It should also be borne in mind that the HAP scheme was implemented on a statutory phased pilot basis with an initial 7 local authorities operating the scheme for four months in 2014, an additional 11 in 2015, a further 10 in 2016 and becoming a national scheme with the 3 remaining local authorities in the Dublin Region on 1 March 2017.

Budget 2017 has increased the Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme to €152.7 million, in order to meet the continuing costs of existing HAP households, and the costs of the additional 15,000 households, targeted under Rebuilding Ireland, to be supported by HAP in 2017.

I continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review but I am currently satisfied with how the scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme committed to under Rebuilding Ireland.

Planning Issues

2051. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will introduce legislation to give powers to the local authorities to compel householders and property owners to deal with tall and dangerous trees which are blocking the light for adjacent residents; if local authorities can also be compelled to take action in respect of tall and dangerous trees on their own properties which are blocking sunlight; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38562/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Planning legislation places no specific restrictions on the height of trees, nor does it make any particular provision for remedy from any other nuisance which may be caused by trees in an urban residential area. However, there is currently a civil remedy available through the Courts concerning branches or roots of neighbouring trees encroaching on a person's property.

The possibility of providing a broader civil law remedy for parties affected by high trees and hedges on adjoining properties was raised previously with the Minister for Justice. In this regard, advice was sought on the possibility of legislative provision being made, whereby a person substantially deprived of the enjoyment of their property, such as the deprivation of light caused by high trees on a neighbouring property, could apply to the Courts for an order, and that the Courts could make an order as they see fit, e.g. to cut the trees back to an appropriate height. Safety considerations relating to overhanging trees could also potentially be addressed in any such provisions.

In response, the Minister for Justice suggested that disputes of this nature between neighbours could perhaps be more appropriately dealt with through mediation - which is being increasingly used internationally as a tool for the resolution of civil disputes - rather than through

the Courts. In this regard, I understand that the Department of Justice has published the Mediation Bill 2017, which is currently progressing through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Bill contains proposals for a comprehensive statutory framework to promote the resolution of disputes through mediation as an alternative to court proceedings which should ideally be only used as a last resort. In essence, the underlying objective of the Bill is to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings, thereby reducing legal costs, speeding up the resolution of disputes and reducing the stress and acrimony which often accompanies court proceedings, including those involving adjoining property owners.

In relation to dangerous trees, section 70 of the Roads Act 1993 - which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport – provides that, where a tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation is a hazard or potential hazard to persons using a public road or where it obstructs or interferes with the safe use of a public road or with the maintenance of a public road, a road authority may serve a notice in writing on the owner or occupier of the land on which such tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation is situated, requiring the preservation, felling, cutting, lopping, trimming or removal of such tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation within the period stated in the notice.

I also understand that under Section 58 of the Communications Regulation Act 2002 – which comes under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment - an electronic communications network operator or any person authorised by the operator may lop or cut any tree, shrub or hedge which obstructs or interferes with any physical infrastructure of the network operator.

With regard to tall and dangerous trees on local authority property, local authorities - as with all landowners - are responsible for the safety and maintenance of trees on their land.

Question No. 2052 answered with Question No. 2038.

Planning Data

2053. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of planning applications for new housing units that have been received to the end of June 2017; the number in each of the years 2014 to 2016 for private housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38594/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Planning statistics are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website. The statistics collected relate to the total numbers of:

- Invalid applications received,
- Applications received for outline permission and full permission,
- Decisions to grant/refuse permission,
- Decisions issued within the statutory eight-week period,
- Decisions deferred, and
- Percentages for grants/refusals, decisions made within eight weeks and decisions deferred.

The statistics collected relate to the total numbers of applications and decisions for all devel-

opments that require planning permission broken down by year and planning authority. However the statistics are not broken down by development type, and so do not include the specific information requested by the Deputy on the number of new housing units and private houses.

However, the Central Statistics Office also compiles statistics on the numbers of planning permissions granted by year (including 2014-2016), which is broken down by type of construction, including dwellings, with the latest data being in respect of Quarter 1 2017. The statistics are available to view at the following link: <http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/housingand-households/> .

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2054. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social housing units that have been constructed in 2017 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38618/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information is currently being finalised in respect of quarter one of 2017 and will be published shortly, with information on quarter two 2017 to follow thereafter.

A comprehensive status list of social housing schemes for all local authority areas can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/> .

This status report covers the period up to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017 and lists 607 approved social housing construction projects, their locations and also includes a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered during 2016 and to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017, it also shows those progressing through planning, design and construction. Details in respect of Quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

These 607 projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by Approved Housing Bodies. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and AHBs concerned, in the first instance. However, within the overall 21,000 social housing solutions targeted for delivery this year, some 4,500 of these will be delivered through new builds/acquisitions and a significant proportion of these will involve new construction.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and AHBs, details of which will be included in the next quarterly report under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2055. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of affordable housing units that have been acquired or constructed in 2017 to date; the location of such affordable house building by county; the definition of affordable housing by couples and individuals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38619/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In 2011, given the prevailing housing market conditions, the Government stood down the various Affordable Housing Schemes in operation at the time (the 1999 Affordable Housing Scheme, affordable housing provision under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Affordable Housing Initiative). Local authorities have been carrying a certain stock of unsold affordable houses, mainly acquired under Part V, which they generally have been renting to social housing tenants. A small number of affordable houses may have been sold by local authorities in recent years.

Housing affordability for individual households is a unique function of, inter alia, income, prevailing market prices and rents in different locations and access to funding and finance. There has been a very significant amount of research undertaken on this topic and, while there is no universally ideal price/rent to income ratio or minimum residual income requirement, there is broad agreement that ideally households should be spending no more than one third of their net income on housing costs over the longer term.

In terms of housing supply and other housing indicators, my Department publishes Monthly Housing Activity Reports that draw together the most up-to-date data on housing activity indicators, such as planning permissions, housing development site commencements, ESB connections, social housing output, and average residential purchase and rental prices. The latest monthly report can be accessed on the Rebuilding Ireland website at the following weblink: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/house-building-activity-gathering-strength-and-pace/> .

As signalled, the issue of housing affordability is being examined by my Department, including consideration of the latest data on household incomes, observed rents and house purchase prices, in the context of the ongoing focused review of Rebuilding Ireland . I expect this work to be concluded in the coming weeks and I will be considering the potential role of new initiatives in that context.

Local Authority Housing

2056. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps taken and dates when each step was completed or cleared by and between the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Dublin City Council, from initial presentation by DCC until the current date with regard to housing projects (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38639/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The 4-stage approval process, under which assessments are carried out for publicly funded capital projects for which my Department is the sanctioning authority, is a streamlining of the 9 stages covered under Capital Works Management Framework.

The 4 stages are:

Stage 1 – Capital Appraisal (establish the business case);

Stage 2 – Brief pre-planning developed design and cost check;

Stage 3 – Pre-tender cost check;

Stage 4 – Tender approval.

These 4 stages are advanced largely in parallel with the normal local authority work on planning, designing and tendering of social housing construction projects. Therefore projects continue to be advanced while stages are cleared and the approval process does not negatively impact on the overall delivery.

The time taken for advancement through the various stages will always vary, with the quality and completeness of the initial proposal and subsequent submissions as well as the scale and complexity of individual projects. My Department also encourages informal technical dialogue to resolve issues and while that might appear to add to the time it takes to issue an approval, it is normally a more productive engagement in terms of getting projects from concept to completion as efficiently as possible.

In relation to the schemes mentioned by the Deputy, they are at various stages in the approval process; the first is Stage 1 approved since July 2015, the second was submitted to my Department for consideration as a Rapid Build scheme in August 2017 and the third received Stage 4 tender approval in November 2014.

My Department continues to liaise with DCC on a regular basis in relation to the advancement and scheduling of social housing projects in the Dublin area with a view to supporting DCC deliver much needed homes for those who need them most.

Local Authority Housing Provision

2057. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the slow timeframe needed to complete the current four social housing approval stages between local authorities and the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; the way in which this process could be reduced to speed up the time taken from when a site and project have been identified by the local authority to when a contractor commences on site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38640/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The 4-stage approval process, under which assessments are carried out for publicly funded capital projects for which my Department is the sanctioning authority, is a streamlining of the 9 stages covered under Capital Works Management Framework. The 4 stages are:

Stage 1 – Capital Appraisal (establish the business case);

Stage 2 – Brief pre-planning developed design and cost check;

Stage 3 – Pre-tender cost check;

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complexity of individual projects. My Department also encourages informal technical dialogue to resolve issues and while that might appear to add to the time it takes to issue an approval, it is normally a more productive engagement in terms of getting projects from concept to completion as efficiently as possible.

Social housing projects funded by my Department, like all Government Capital construction projects, must comply with the Government's Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF), the strategic objectives of which are to ensure greater cost certainty, better value for money and financial accountability, at all stages during project delivery and more efficient end-user delivery.

Having streamlined the nine approval stages of the CWMF to just four approval stages for capital-funded social housing construction projects, my Department has no interest in unnecessarily prolonging the time involved in the approvals. In fact, the approvals themselves represent a small minority only of the time taken in advancing a build project onto site. The operation of the approval process means that local authorities forward design proposals and costings to the Department sequentially, as the authorities advance the projects through their own planning work.

At the same time, my Department is very conscious of the importance of striving for speed and efficiency in the delivery of social housing and, under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of procedures in relation to project approvals was carried out and is available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Social-Housing_Approval-Processes-Procedures-Review-1.pdf .

The recommendations of the Review include better "pre-approval" communications on construction proposals, using opportunities to combine project approval stages and setting targets on projects for turnaround times for approval. All of these recommendations are being implemented by my Department and local authorities. Indeed, a Working Group comprising representatives from local authorities and my Department has been established to agree swift and ambitious turnaround timeframes for project approvals and this group will conclude its work shortly.

For smaller projects (less than 15 units and less than €2m) we have introduced a single stage approval process which may suit less complex schemes to be delivered in this manner.

In addition, my Department has asked all local authorities to review the social housing projects in their areas and in the interest of achieving earliest delivery, they have been requested to consider their suitability for Design and Build contracts under the Rapid Delivery Framework set up by the Office of Government Procurement. They have been asked to consider, in particular, schemes which are amenable to early commencement, particularly in terms of their approved planning status.

Housing Provision

2058. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to establish a housing executive with emergency acquisition and building powers for the four Dublin counties and other urban regions in view of the scale of social housing provision now needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38653/17]

2059. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will introduce housing emergency legislative powers including a full cap on rents and property acquisition and build out powers for local authorities or a national regional

housing executive. [38654/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2058 and 2059 together.

All key indicators of construction activity show that residential construction is ramping up considerably and the recent ESRI Summer Quarterly Economic Commentary published on 22 June 2017 forecasts that house completions will reach 18,500 this year and 23,500 in 2018, suggesting that the overarching Rebuilding Ireland target of 25,000 homes per year by 2020 will be met and quite likely exceeded to meet the pent-up demand.

Moreover, 47,000 social housing units will be delivered in the period to 2021 from a budget of €5.35 billion. In 2016, some 19,000 social housing supports were provided, through newly built homes, refurbishments and acquisitions as well as through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme. In 2017, I expect that some 21,000 households will have their social housing needs met.

We are now one year into the implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan and many key actions have been delivered or are in train. It is therefore an opportune time to take stock, in the light of current and emerging trends in housing and homelessness, in order to assess the progress and impact made to date, ensure that it remains responsive to evolving issues, and identify further actions and increased ambitions that may be required.

In this regard, my Department has undertaken a review of Rebuilding Ireland, in consultation with key stakeholders and the general public. I expect this work to be completed over the coming weeks, with a focus on accelerating construction and new supply. Details of new initiatives will be outlined as they are finalised.

Brexit Issues

2060. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38697/17]

2061. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38713/17]

2062. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38729/17]

2063. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38745/17]

2064. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38761/17]

2065. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38777/17]

2066. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38809/17]

2068. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38841/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2060 to 2066, inclusive, and 2068 together.

The comprehensive document Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach published on 2 May 2017, outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government's National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in the comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government's continuing work to ensure that Ireland's interests are reflected in the EU's approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland's strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland's wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the new 10-year Capital Plan; the Enterprise 2025 Pol-

icy; and sectorial policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy. In so far as my Department is concerned, the National Planning Framework for Ireland 2040 is due to be finalised this year and, along with the Capital Plan and other long-term Government strategies, will play an important role in preparing for the consequences of Brexit.

The extent to which Brexit will impact on the housing market is uncertain at this point in time as it will be determined at least in part by the nature of the future relationship between the EU and the UK. While no specific funding need has been identified in relation to Brexit matters for my Department at this time, the Department is collaborating in a research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute which includes work on estimating housing demand, including examining the implications for the housing market of changes in population, Brexit-related or otherwise, which might arise over the medium term.

The Brexit negotiations are a dynamic process and my Department will continue to work across Government, supporting the sectorial workgroups established as required.

Brexit Staff

2067. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38825/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are no vacancies in my Department for Brexit related roles currently. Matters in relation to Brexit are managed by the business unit responsible for the coordination of EU and international business in my Department, with input from relevant line sections and experts across the organisation, as necessary.

Question No. 2068 answered with Question No. 2060.

Brexit Issues

2069. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38857/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): To date, no specific Brexit-related stakeholder engagement groups have been established by my Department. This reflects the reality that the priorities identified by Government in planning and preparing for Brexit relate to trade and the economy; protecting the Peace Process; maintaining the Common Travel Area; and the future of the European remit.

The whole-of Government response to Brexit has been marked by a highly consultative approach, through the all-island Civic Dialogue Process and other stakeholder events at home and abroad, to which my Department has contributed as appropriate. This process will continue as the negotiations unfold.

The Brexit negotiations are a dynamic process which will continue to unfold over the coming months and my Department will address any issues arising including, if required, the establishment of specific stakeholder engagement groups.

Departmental Expenditure

2071. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38905/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While the need for, and objectives of, expenditure programmes are kept under regular review, there are at present no specific programmes being funded from my Department's Vote for 2017 that are likely to yield significant savings in 2018. Indeed, in relation to housing, additional funding requirements are recognised and provided for in the €5.35 billion of funding committed to under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness for the period to 2021 and this issue is being considered further in the context of the ongoing review of the Plan.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

2072. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a list of all Part V housing units funded by his Department in the past 12 months, by housing development listing; the number of units in each development; and the cost to his Department for units on each development, in tabular form. [38929/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 made a number of amendments to Part V of the Act, following the outcome of an independent review, which included a consultation process. The amendments, effective from 1 September 2015, sought to maximise the contribution Part V can make to social housing supply and sustainable mixed-tenure communities across the country.

A principal change was the reduction in the requirement from 20% to 10%. This reduction needs to be considered together with other amendments which reduced the options contained in section 96 for the delivery of units within a Part V agreement. The payment of cash in lieu of units or the transfer of sites or parts of sites was removed, and instead the remaining options are focused on the delivery of completed units. The current options for Part V delivery are:

- the transfer of ownership of land, subject to the planning permission application, to a local authority for the provision of social housing remains the default option as is currently the case;

- the transfer of ownership to the local authority, or persons nominated, of completed social housing units on other land. There is no longer a requirement for the developer to build housing units on other land to fulfil his/her Part V obligations;

- the Part V obligation can now be fulfilled by developers through long term leasing of properties; and

- a combination of the Part V options above is also allowed.

The provision of land rather than houses remains the default position if the developer wishes to exercise that option. The other principle change is that with effect from 1 September 2015,

any relevant planning permission granted must contain a condition that the Part V agreement be entered into prior to the lodging of a commencement notice. This is a significant change, which should frontload the delivery of social housing units to the local authority.

The Department supports local authorities and approved housing bodies to acquire these units through the provision of capital assistance under the Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP), Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and also provides a mechanism for the long-term leasing of Part V units under the Social Housing Current Expenditure programme (SHCEP). As such, there is no one dedicated funding scheme for Part V units.

It should be noted that some developments completed in 2016/2017 may have been subject to older Part V agreements made before 1 September 2015, when other options - such as a financial contribution, the provision of fully or partially serviced sites or the provision of land elsewhere in the functional area of the planning authority - were available. Therefore it should be understood that because the Part V units currently being delivered may originate from either developments under old permissions/ agreements or new agreements, costs differ and an average cost would not be indicative.

Details on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, are published on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>. Information is currently being finalised in respect of quarter one of 2017 and will be published shortly, with information on quarter two 2017 to follow thereafter. Specific data relating to 2016 social housing output arising from Part V agreements will be available on my Department's website shortly.

Local Authority Housing Funding

2073. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government what grants or financial supports available to persons who own their own house in circumstances (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38949/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides capital funding to local authorities for Improvement Works In Lieu (IWILs) to enable them to repair, improve or extend privately owned houses that are occupied by approved housing applicants, as an alternative to the provision of local authority housing.

IWILs are administered under the Disabled Person's Grants (DPG) scheme and it is a matter for each local authority to prioritise their need under the scheme, including cases such as the one referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied.

My Department requests submissions for proposals under the scheme every year from local authorities and funding is provided to the authorities based on the scale of need identified. It should be noted that the administration of the scheme, including its promotion, the assessment of applications and the allocation of funds for the works, is a matter for each local authority based on their assessment of need and value for money considerations.

Local Authority Rates

2074. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the collection rates for commercial rates by each local authority; the amounts collected in the last year for which figures are available in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38965/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority. The annual rate on valuation (ARV), which is applied to the valuation of each property determined by the Valuation Office, to obtain the amount payable in rates, is decided by the elected members of each local authority in the annual budget and its determination is a reserved function. Rates income is a very important contribution to the cost of services provided by local authorities such as roads, public lighting, development control, parks and open spaces.

The latest available audited information relates to 2015 and the table below sets out the percentage and amount collected by each local authority.

Local Authority	2015 %	Collected €
Carlow	84%	11,350,009
Cavan	82%	11,943,256
Clare	82%	36,985,564
Cork City	78%	61,224,285
Cork	86%	119,163,164
Donegal	63%	24,692,578
Dublin	88%	314,107,645
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	85%	77,695,710
Fingal	96%	115,423,490
Galway City	72%	31,941,718
Galway	81%	21,571,674
Kerry	80%	33,518,689
Kildare	82%	50,938,296
Kilkenny	92%	15,877,981
Laois	75%	9,898,811
Leitrim	79%	4,226,300
Limerick	75%	51,391,697
Longford	82%	6,396,247
Louth	60%	25,578,002
Mayo	80%	19,729,275
Meath	85%	29,289,390
Monaghan	77%	10,523,911
Offaly	85%	11,463,251
Roscommon	93%	8,751,416
Sligo	74%	10,608,718
South Dublin	81%	107,685,870
Tipperary	78%	26,063,250
Waterford	79%	29,521,260
Westmeath	79%	12,706,214

Local Authority	2015 %	Collected €
Wexford	75%	27,447,399
Wicklow	76%	26,778,891
Total		€1,344,493,961

Housing Provision

2075. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will introduce an older persons' housing designation for private sector housing schemes which would facilitate older persons in downsizing and would also ensure that such schemes would remain in use for older persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38993/17]

2076. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will give consideration to requiring a fixed percentage of housing development to be dedicated to older persons' housing in order to cater for full life cycle housing location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38994/17]

2077. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide funding and set targets for the operation of the financial contribution scheme in view of its success in the past, the popularity of the scheme with older persons and the sustainability of the freeing up of family homes in established housing estates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38995/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2075 to 2077, inclusive, together.

My Department is committed to supporting older people to live in their own home with dignity and independence for as long as possible, as this has the best outcomes both for the individual and for society as a whole. Rebuilding Ireland aims to ensure that older people have a range of housing choices available to them and there is an overall commitment to examine the potential of targeted schemes to meet differing housing needs. To this end, my Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is developing policy options for supported housing/housing with care so that older people have a wider range of accommodation choices available to them, options that will enable them to choose accommodation that is appropriate and suited to their needs.

Planning authorities are required, under section 94 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, to include a housing strategy in their development plans which must outline the authorities' plans for the existing and future housing needs of the population of their areas. The housing strategy must include provisions to ensure that a mixture of house types and sizes is developed to reasonably match the requirements of the different categories of households including the special requirements of elderly persons and persons with disabilities. Housing strategies must also have regard to relevant policies or objectives of the Government.

Local authorities are already involved in projects to enable older persons to downsize from accommodation that has become too large for them. The financial contribution scheme is a scheme operated by Dublin City Council which facilitated older people to downsize thus potentially freeing up these larger homes for use as family units. The scheme is currently under review by the City Council. Cork City Council have a similar 'downsizing scheme' for both social housing tenants and private home owners and other local authorities are considering options for similar schemes. The recently launched Annamore Court in Ballyfermot is an example

of a scheme that incorporates downsizing options.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

2078. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of persons who have left the Defence Forces in 2015 and 2016 and to date 2017, not including mandatory retirements, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36780/17]

2079. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of persons within the Defence Forces who have taken mandatory retirement in 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; the number estimated to take mandatory retirement in each of the years 2018 to 2020, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36781/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2078 and 2079 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables below. Figures quoted for 2017 are accurate to 31st August, 2017.

Personnel exiting Defence Forces excluding Mandatory Retirements

Year	2015	2016	2017
Number of personnel	440	529	335

Personnel exiting Defence Forces by way of Mandatory Retirement

Year	2015	2016	2017
Number of personnel	116	126	99

Estimated mandatory retirements from 2018 to 2020

Year	2018	2019	2020
Estimated Number	61	82	98

The term “mandatory retirement” encompasses personnel who fall into such categories as those who have retired on age grounds and those who fall below required medical standards. The term “not including mandatory retirement” encompasses personnel who fall into such categories as those who leave at their own request, those who leave by way of purchasing their discharge and those who leave the Defence Forces having served 21 years.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with operational requirements. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force, targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. In 2017, the Defence Forces are targeting an increase in the level of recruitment across the range of recruitment streams. The 2017 Cadet competition was launched on 22 March 2017. A total of 100 Cadet inductions are due to take place in September 2017.

General service recruitment campaigns for both the Army and Naval Service were launched earlier this year. The competitions have now progressed and general service recruitment has commenced. It is also planned to launch another general service recruitment campaign later this month.

Naval Service Vessels

2080. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the efforts to procure a multi-role vessel for the Naval Service; the projected cost of acquiring this vessel; and when this vessel is due to come into service. [36890/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The most significant investment of recent years by the Defence Organisation has been on the procurement of the new Off-Shore Patrol Vessels for the Naval Service. The third ship in the programme, LÉ William Butler Yeats was commissioned in October 2016, joining LÉ Samuel Beckett and LÉ James Joyce in operational service. A contract for an additional sister ship was placed with Babcock International in June 2016 at a cost of €54.3m, bringing investment in the new ships programme to over €250 million since 2010. The fourth ship, to be named LÉ George Bernard Shaw, is scheduled for delivery in mid 2018. This aligns with the project planning process in place under the White Paper on Defence which will determine the Defence Organisation's maritime capability requirements.

The White Paper provides for the replacement of the current flagship, LÉ Eithne, by a multi-role vessel (MRV). LÉ Eithne was built in 1984. It is the Government's intent that this new vessel will provide a flexible and adaptive capability for a wide range of maritime tasks, both at home and overseas. In addition, the two existing Coastal Patrol Vessels, LÉ Ciara and LÉ Orla (also built in 1984) are due for replacement in the coming years. It is outlined in the White Paper that these ships will be replaced with similar type vessels with countermine and counter IED capabilities. Work has commenced in the Department of Defence on the next phase of the Naval Service Vessel Replacement Programme. The planning process is underway which will see specifications for the replacement vessels drawn up to meet the required operational capabilities. The initial focus will be on the requirement for a multi-role vessel. It is the intention to hold a public tender competition in due course to cover the supply of the MRV subject to the availability of funding within the overall Defence capital funding envelope. The cost of the MRV will only be known once the tender competition is concluded. It is too early to estimate when the MRV is expected to enter operational service.

Civil Defence

2081. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the fact that Civil Defence transactions are overwhelmingly carried out in cash; his further views on whether he is satisfied with the oversight mechanisms in place; his plans to change the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36907/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I do not accept that Civil Defence transactions are overwhelmingly carried out in cash. Funding for Civil Defence operations is shared on a 70/30 basis between my Department and local authorities by way of an annual grant to each authority. The grant covers all allowable administration and running costs for Civil Defence in each local authority. This grant and all other transactions in relation to Civil Defence are dealt with through my Department's financial management system and are carried out in line with public financial procedures.

Civil Defence operations at local level are carried out under the control of the relevant local authority. The annual grant to each local authority is issued following a detailed examination of certified financial returns on the previous year's expenditure. This includes confirmation by the local authority that a control environment is in place to ensure accountability for all income,

expenditure, donations or gifts in relation to the operation of Civil Defence.

Separately, the external auditor for Local Government includes the Civil Defence grants as part of its annual audit agenda.

Departmental Staff Data

2082. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of political staff employed in his Department, including parliamentary assistants, secretarial assistants, special advisors, drivers and other relevant positions; the number of civil or public service staff seconded to work within his Department or constituency offices; the salaries and job titles of each such person; the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36950/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following are the details of staff currently employed in my offices in the Department of Defence in Newbridge, in Government Buildings and in my constituency.

Grade	Role	Salary Scale
1 Higher Executive Officer *	Private Secretary	€47,081 - €61,224
1 Executive Officer	Private Office (Newbridge)	€28,739 - €48,975
2 Clerical Officer	Private Office (Newbridge)	€23,565 - €37,267
1 Special Adviser		€79,401 - €91,624
1 Press Adviser		€79,401 - €91,624
2 Civilian Drivers		€631.75 pw
2 Clerical Officers	Private Office (Government Buildings)	€23,565 - €37,267

* A Private Secretary Allowance of €20,685 is payable to the holder of this post.

All appointments set out above were made in accordance with the relevant “Instructions to Personnel Officers - Ministerial Appointments” issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

My constituency office is staffed by one Parliamentary Assistant and one Secretarial Assistant, both of whom are paid by the Houses of the Oireachtas and as such my Department does not have salary information in relation to these members of staff.

In the period January 2015 – May 2016 the following staff were employed in Ministerial Offices in the Department of Defence.

Minister of Defence

Grade

Role

Salary Scale

1 Higher Executive Officer**

Private Secretary

€47,081 - €61,224

1 Executive Officer

Private Office

(Newbridge)

€28,739 - €48,975

1 Staff Officer

Private Office

(Newbridge)

€34,070 - €44,906

1 Clerical Officer

Private Office

(Newbridge)

€23,565 - €37,267

Minister of State

Grade

Role

Salary Scale

1 Higher Executive Officer**

Private Secretary

€47,081 - €61,224

2 Civilian Drivers

€631.75 per week

* * A Private Secretary Allowance of € 19,653 was pay able to the holder of these posts.

All appointments set out above were made in accordance with the relevant “Instructions to Personnel Officers - Ministerial Appointments ” issued by the Department of Public Expendi-

ture and Reform.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

2083. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Questions Nos 1726 and 1727 of 26 July 2017, his views on whether the stock management in the Defence Forces pharmacy may be inadequate. [36975/17]

2084. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason for the very different figures for the number of doxycycline tablets purchased provided in response to parliamentary questions numbers 622 of 17 July 2012 and 1727 of 26 July 2017; and the reason for the difference of almost 20,000 tablets reported as purchased in the two replies. [37014/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2083 and 2084 together.

I am advised by the military authorities that the stock management policy and processes in the Defence Forces are reviewed on an annual basis. I am informed that stock levels are predominately demand-driven and that pharmaceutical requirements are met where possible under a 'Just in Time' model which leads to next day delivery directly to the patient site resulting in decreased lead times and lower stock holdings.

The military authorities have indicated that strategic stocks levels of certain medical items are maintained and that these levels are influenced by operational demands and contingencies .

With regard to the difference in figures provided in previous PQ's in relation to the number of doxycycline tablets purchased, the military authorities have advised that the figures provided are currently being examined. I will issue a further response to you as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff Data

2085. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of women and men respectively employed in his Department, in tabular form. [37069/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 31 August 2017, the number of women and men respectively employed as civil servants in my Department is as follows:

Women	Men	Total
230	123	353

Departmental Staff Data

2086. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of men and women respectively in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [37080/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The number of

women and men respectively employed in my Department as of 31 August 2017 that hold posts as Secretary General, Second Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Assistant Secretary/Director, Principal and Assistant Principal is as follows:

Post	Women	Men
Secretary General	0	1
Second Secretary	0	0
Deputy Secretary	0	0
Assistant Secretary /Director	1	3
Principal	6	9
Assistant Principal	12	28

Ministerial Functions

2087. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there are functions and responsibilities he has not delegated as Minister for Defence to the Minister of State for Defence; and if so the details of same. [37140/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Pursuant to the Defence (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order (S.I No.299 of 2017), statutory responsibility for a wide range of Defence matters as provided for in enactments relating to the Department of Defence has been delegated to me. As well as specifying the powers that have been delegated, the Order also specifies the Ministerial powers and responsibilities arising under these enactments that have not been delegated. These are as follows:

- the powers conferred under the enactments specified in the Order to prosecute an offence;
- powers arising under sections 11, 17, 87 and 88 of the Defence Act 1954.

Departmental Banking

2088. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost his Department incurred in each of the past five years due to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees; the financial institutions to which the payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37222/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The costs incurred by my Department in each of the past five years in respect of credit card/banking fees are set out in the table below:

Credit Card/ Banking Fees 2013	Credit Card/ Banking Fees 2014	Credit Card/ Banking Fees 2015	Credit Card/ Banking Fees 2016	Credit Card/ Banking Fees 2017
€41	€275	€367.77	€413.62	€193.53

My Department has a credit card policy in place which lays out the conditions for the use of business credit cards issued by the Department. The cardholder is obliged to certify that expenditure on the cards was incurred for official purposes only and in accordance with the Department's guidelines on the use of credit cards. Expenditure on the cards is subject to continuous monitoring by the appropriate authority.

Bank of Ireland is the institute to which payments set out in the table were made.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

2089. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the supports in place for members of the Permanent Defence Forces that become homeless; the number of such cases in the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37292/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In the first instance the issue of housing is a matter for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

If individuals are not in a position to secure housing in their own right it may be the case that they qualify for social housing or that they qualify for housing assistance. When requested to do so, the Department and the Defence Forces provide whatever support possible, including documentation, to assist personnel in accessing available housing supports. In addition, the services of the Defence Forces Personnel Support Service are also available if required.

The Personnel Support Service provides a confidential information, education, support and referral service. The Personnel Support Service is designed to give Defence Forces personnel and their families access to information and services from within and outside the military community.

The Personnel Support Service is staffed by qualified Barrack Personnel Support Service Officers and Social Workers who have experience in dealing with a range of problems that may exist in a person's life. Liaison with civilian agencies including, for example, housing authorities, is a feature of the Personnel Support Service.

In relation to Defence Forces personnel who experience difficulty with housing, they can access the Personnel Support Service who will facilitate them in a supporting letter to their local authority or provide more general advice on their situation.

Neither my Department nor the Defence Forces hold details of the incidence of homelessness among members of the Permanent Defence Force.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government provides a range of housing supports to assist individuals and families, including social housing and housing assistance payments. The long-term solution to the current homeless issue is to increase the supply of homes. Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness is designed to accelerate all types of housing supply – social, private and rental. In particular, Rebuilding Ireland seeks the delivery of increased volumes of social housing over the coming years (47,000 units by 2021) and places a focus on delivering long-term housing solutions for homeless households.

In 2016 the Government provided social housing solutions for 19,000 households including 5,000 homes under the build, acquisitions and vacant homes programmes with expenditure of €935m. This year €1.3 billion is being provided to support social housing delivery, including longer term accommodation for homeless families.

Defence Forces Retirements

2090. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the timeframe for implementing the agreement reached by PDFORRA and Defence Forces management for the discretionary extension of an additional two years service to the upper service limit of 50 years of age for members of the Defence Forces. [37479/17]

2091. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to change the upper service limit of 50 years of age for privates and corporals (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37480/17]

2094. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the time-frame for the implementation of the agreement that was reached in 2015 to allow an extension of the upper service limit of 50 years of age for chefs serving in the Defence Forces; and when similar arrangements will be put in place for other members of the Defence Forces presently forced to retire after 21 years service. [37483/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2090, 2091 and 2094 together.

Military life places unique physical and psychological demands on individuals and it is necessary that its members be physically and mentally prepared to meet the challenges of all military operations and to undertake their duties on deployment overseas. To this end, it is vital the age and health profile of personnel be such as to ensure that operational capability and effectiveness are not compromised in any way.

The unsatisfactory age and fitness profile of the Permanent Defence Force was an issue of serious concern during the 1990s and was the subject of severe criticism by a series of external reports, mainly Price Waterhouse Consultants and the Efficiency Audit Group (EAG). One of the key areas identified for urgent action by the EAG was the development of a manpower policy with an emphasis on lowering the age profile of Permanent Defence Force personnel. As a result new terms and conditions were introduced for enlisted personnel enlisting after 1994. Arising from a claim by PDFORRA, a new set of criteria was agreed with PDFORRA to provide longer careers for those who enlisted post 1994 while continuing to address the Government's objective of having an appropriate age profile to meet the challenges of a modern Defence Forces. The criteria require that any person re-engaging after 12 years service must be able to continue to operate both at home and overseas on an ongoing basis. Re-engagement is subject to the individual soldier meeting specified criteria in regard to physical fitness, medical category, successful completion of military courses of instruction, service overseas and conduct ratings.

The maximum service period for these personnel is as follows:

- Enlisted Personnel, up to and including the rank of Corporal (and equivalent Naval Service rank), may not serve beyond 21 years service.

- Enlisted Personnel, in the rank of Sergeant (and equivalent Naval Service rank), may be permitted to continue in service up to the age of fifty years.

- Enlisted Personnel in all higher ranks may serve to the age of fifty-six.

The first effects of the agreement, whereby Privates and Corporals may not serve beyond 21 years, arose for Permanent Defence Force members in those ranks in 2015.

A claim was received from PDFORRA for a further review in relation to this matter. That claim was adjudicated on in December 2015. The adjudicator made specific findings on the matter. Officials in my Department are currently analysing the issues arising in relation to the implementation of these findings and will recommend to me any necessary regulatory changes in respect of the terms of service for Enlisted Personnel.

2092. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to reinstate the rent allowance scheme or to provide an equivalent allowance of €500 for members of the Defence Forces (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37481/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): This matter is currently under consideration through the Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. The Deputy will appreciate that as discussions within the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme are confidential to the parties involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further in the matter.

Army Barracks

2093. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of beds in use in barracks across the State divided by temporary and standard accommodation, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37482/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The number of bed places currently available for use by military personnel at each of the permanently occupied military locations is shown in the table below. This accommodation is generally referred to as Single Living In accommodation and the overall provision of such accommodation is based on military operational requirement.

Temporary accommodation at the above locations is intended for use on a short term basis e.g. for transit, training purposes as indicated in the table.

Non-temporary accommodation at the above locations is classified as standard or non-standard, using criteria established by the military authorities, primarily room size.

Location	Total Number Of Beds Available For Use	Standard	Non Standard	Temporary (Transit/Training etc)
1st Brigade				
Collins Bks, Cork	227	48	81	98
Dún UiM-haoilíosa Bks, Galway	184	103	1	80
Sarsfield Bks, Limerick	133	103	0	30
Stephens Bks, Kilkenny	133	7	33	93
2nd Brigade				
Aiken Bks, Dundalk	180	56	24	100
Cathal Brugha Bks, Dublin	356	91	137	128
Custume Bks, Athlone	234	201	33	0

Finner Camp, Donegal	190	141	4	45
Gormanston Camp, Meath	134	88	6	40
McKee Bks, Dublin	249	136	50	63
St Bricin's Hospital, Dublin	12	0	12	0
Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel	201	27	149	25
DFTC, Curragh Camp	970	365	195	410
Naval Base, Haulbowline, Cork	222	122	36	64
Total	3,425	1,488	761	1,176

Question No. 2094 answered with Question No. 2090.

Defence Forces Allowances

2095. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to extend the €150 flat rate expenses allowance for ceremonial uniforms to be used to service combat uniforms for members of the Defence Forces. [37484/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Flat Rate Expenses Allowance referred to by the Deputy was negotiated between PDFORRA, on behalf of its members, and the Office of Revenue Commissioners and these negotiations did not involve my Department. Therefore any claim to extend the allowance would be a matter for PDFORRA and the Revenue Commissioners.

Defence Forces Properties

2096. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the military installations owned and run by the State; the service provided by these installations; the average number of military personnel stationed in these buildings on an annual basis; the cost of recent upgrades to these structures in the past ten years; the planned upgrade or refurbishment pending on same, in tabular form [37491/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): It has not been possible to compile the information requested in the time available. My officials are working with the military authorities to obtain the information which will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Defence Forces Equipment

2097. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to upgrade or replace military equipment across the three services over the next five years; the estimated cost for replacing or upgrading this equipment; and the list of countries from which this equipment is being procured. [37492/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government as set out on the White Paper on Defence. Equipment priorities for the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process. In this context the principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas.

There is focus on the essential force protection provided by armoured vehicles, and in this regard a maintenance and upgrade programme has commenced for the current fleet of 80 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) which will seek to ensure viability of the fleet out to 2030. A contract was agreed in December 2016 with General Dynamics European Land Systems – Mowag, the original manufacturer of the fleet based in Switzerland, for a maintenance and upgrade programme. The value of the contract is €55m exclusive of VAT.

A small number of armoured logistical vehicles and armoured utility vehicles are also being procured for force protection from Westward Scania Ireland and Centigon France respectively, at an estimated total cost of €11m exclusive of VAT. Both contracts were awarded on foot of public tender competitions.

The White Paper underpins the ongoing replacement of the Naval Service fleet. A significant investment over recent years has been on the procurement of new Off-Shore Patrol Vessels for the Naval Service. The third ship in the programme, LÉ William Butler Yeats, was commissioned in to service in October 2016. A contract for an additional sister ship was placed with Babcock International, a British company, in June 2016 bringing investment in the new ships programme to over €250 million since 2010. The fourth ship, to be named LÉ George Bernard Shaw is scheduled for delivery in mid 2018.

Future Naval Service capabilities are being planned as part of the White Paper project planning process which will determine the Defence Organisation's maritime capability requirements. The White Paper provides for the replacement of the current Naval Service flagship LÉ Eithne with a multi role vessel which will be enabled for helicopter operations and will also have a freight carrying capacity. It is the intention to hold a public tender competition in due course to cover the supply of the MRV subject to the availability of funding within the overall Defence capital funding envelope. The cost of the MRV will only be known once the tender competition is concluded.

The White Paper provides that the Air Corps will see the Cessna fleet replaced with three larger aircraft suitably equipped for Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. The tender competition for the procurement of the three new aircraft is underway and the cost will be determined by the outcome of the tender competition. The White Paper also provides for the replacement of two CASA 235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft with consideration of their replacement with larger more capable aircraft. This would enhance maritime surveillance and provide a greater degree of utility for transport and cargo carrying tasks.

Also, a decision was made in 2016 to replace a PC-9M aircraft and this aircraft was deliv-

ered from Pilatus Aircraft in Switzerland this July at a cost of €5m exclusive of VAT. The new aircraft brings the fleet up to 8 and will assist in a required increase in pilot training in the Air Corps.

Defence Forces Recruitment

2098. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his Department's recruitment policy for allowing members of the transgender and LGBT communities to enlist in all branches of the Defence Forces. [37493/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government believes that the Defence Forces should reflect the modern demographics of Irish society. To that end, the Defence Forces are committed to the principle of equal opportunities in all of its employment policies. Furthermore, the Defence Forces are committed to ensuring that the principles of equality are adhered to in recruitment, induction, employment and daily routine, training, education and promotion. The Defence Forces welcomes applications from all members of Irish society, irrespective of religion, sexual orientation or gender, including transgender. The Defence Forces operate in an environment without discrimination in areas covered by the Equality Acts and they comply with the legal provisions of the Gender Recognition Act 2015.

The Defence Forces launched its Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex (LGBTI) network "Defend with Pride" in October, 2016. This Network is a resource for all DF personnel. It aims to provide support, information and guidance for LGBTI personnel and allies who wish to support colleagues, friends and family.

Chaplaincy Services Expenditure

2099. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount paid to the Catholic Church for the employment of chaplains in the Defence Forces in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [37494/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Chaplains of all faiths serving with the Defence Forces are paid directly by my Department from subhead A6 of the Defence Vote. The following table shows the amounts paid to Chaplains in respect of the years in question:

Year	Amount €m
2014	€1.12
2015	€1.05
2016	€0.99
2017 to end July (provisional)	€0.60

Defence Forces Training

2100. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of courses provided by the Defence Forces that receive or do not receive QQI accreditation, in tabular form. [37495/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capa-

bilities necessary to enable it to fulfil the roles laid down by Government. The Defence Forces constantly benchmark training across all three arms against best military and academic practice. Military best practice is ensured by implementing a policy of standardisation that is in line with EU and NATO/Partnership for Peace partners. Academic best practice is ensured by benchmarking courses through accreditation under the National Framework of Qualifications which is validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The Defence Forces currently have 15 courses which are QQI accredited. The Defence Forces provide another 3,871 courses which do not have QQI accreditation because they are delivered for purely military purposes.

The QQI-accredited courses are as follows:

Army Cadet Training Course	Army	Level 7 Minor Award (NUI Maynooth)
Junior Command and Staff Course	Army, Air Corps	Level 8 Dip (NUI Maynooth)
Senior Command and Staff Course	Joint (Tri Service)	Level 9 Masters of Arts (NUI Maynooth)
Senior Command Operator Course	Naval Service	Level 9 Special Purpose Award , (Cork Institute of Technology)
Potential Non Commissioned Officer (NCO) Course	Army, Air Corps	Level 6 Higher Cert (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
Potential NCO Course	Naval Service	Level 6 Higher Cert (Cork Institute of Technology)
Standard NCO Course	Army, Air Corps	Level 7 Minor Award (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
Standard NCO Course	Naval Service	Level 7 Minor Award (Cork Institute of Technology)
Senior NCO Course	Army, Air Corps	Level 7 Ordinary Degree (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
Senior NCO Course	Naval Service	Level 7 Ordinary Degree (Cork Institute of Technology)
Logistics Accountancy Course	Army, Air Corps	Level 7 Ordinary Degree (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
Communications Information Systems (CIS) Corps Young Officer Course	Joint (Tri Service)	Level 9 Masters of Science (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
Engineering Branch Corps Young Officers Course	Army	Level 9 Masters of Science (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
Ordnance Corps Young Officer Course	Army, Naval Service	Level 9 Masters of Engineering (Institute of Technology, Carlow)
CIS Corps Trainee Technician Course	Joint (Tri Service)	Level 7 Ordinary Degree (Institute of Technology, Carlow)

Defence Forces Personnel Data

2101. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel who joined the Permanent Defence Force in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, respectively; and the number of each of these yearly intakes who are still members of the Permanent Defence Force. [37619/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As of 25 August, 2017, the information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

YEAR	ENLISTED Personnel Re-cruited	STILL IN SERVICE	OFFICERS/CA-DETS Recruited	STILL IN SERVICE
2013	419	283	27	24
2014	461	303	42	31
2015	362	276	53	45
2016	589	422	94	91
2017	240	181	13	11

In general for enlisted personnel, the majority of those not still in service departed during the training phase. In relation to cadets, practically all of those no longer in service departed during training. The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with operational requirements. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. In 2017, the Defence Forces are targeting an increase in the level of recruitment across the range of recruitment streams. The 2017 Cadet Competition was launched on 22 March 2017. A total of 100 Cadet inductions are due to take place in September 2017. The Defence Forces also plan to induct new Apprentices shortly.

General service recruitment campaigns for both the Army and Naval Service were launched earlier this year. The competitions have now progressed and general service recruitment has commenced. It is also planned to launch another general service recruitment campaign later this month.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

2102. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount of funding provided to an organisation (details supplied) requested by his Department to administer an emergency humanitarian support scheme to assist small businesses, community, voluntary and sporting bodies return to their pre-flood condition in the aftermath of flooding in County Donegal during the week of 22 August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37782/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is allocating €2m to be distributed as emergency humanitarian support to small businesses and community, sporting and voluntary bodies in County Donegal which through no fault of their own

have been unable to secure flood insurance and have been flooded following the exceptionally heavy rainfall of August 22nd and 23rd.

The scheme is aimed at providing a contribution to the costs of returning premises to their

pre-flood condition including the replacement of flooring, fixtures and fittings and damaged stock. It only applies to premises that have been flooded and it is intended as an emergency humanitarian assistance contribution rather than compensation for loss or a replacement for the cover provided by insurance.

The emergency nature of the response to the difficulties of organisations affected by the flooding required a speedy process in order to meet their needs. In this regard a two step approach is being taken, involving an initial application which, if successful would lead to a quick payment, capped at €5,000 per property.

It is recognised that some premises have suffered significant damages over and above the €5,000 threshold and these will require a more detailed assessment of losses incurred. The second stage of the scheme will be a more lengthy process requiring a detailed assessment and will provide the scope for a further financial contribution with the total payment available for both stages combined capped at €20,000.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

2103. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 314 of 28 June 2017, the reason the information could not be obtained by checking the HSPC, Health Protection Surveillance Centre, returns in view of the fact that malaria is a noticeable disease which should be reported to HSPC. [37838/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have been advised that Defence Force Medical Officers are required to make returns to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) on an individual basis. Therefore, in order to obtain the information that you sought, all available Defence Force Medical Officers were consulted in relation to your question of 28 June.

As I indicated to you in my reply to Parliamentary Question of 14 June 2016, summary information in respect of notifications of infectious diseases is available from the HPSC on their website. However, issues may arise in regard to the accuracy of such data in respect of Defence Force personnel as situations may arise where the status of the individual as a member of the Defence Forces was either not recorded or not declared. While members of the Defence Forces are encouraged to present to the military medical system, they may opt to present to a civilian general practitioner, who may not be aware that they are a member of the Defence Forces. Equally there may be members of the Defence Forces who contracted malaria while on holidays in areas where risk of malaria exists.

Therefore, the Defence Forces are not in a position to corroborate the figures collected by the HPSC attributed to Defence Force personnel.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

2104. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the WHO advice that Lariam, Malarone and doxycycline are all equally effective in preventing malaria in sub-Saharan Africa in view of the fact that in 2015 and 2016 20 to 25% of troops in sub-Saharan Africa were prescribed one of the alternatives to Lariam and there were no cases of malaria during that period. [37839/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Deputy will

be aware that this matter was the subject of discussion at a Private Member's Motion in the Dáil on 28th June last. As I indicated to the House at that time, Malaria is a serious disease and is a threat to any military force operating in areas where the disease is prevalent. It must be emphasised that the reason Defence Forces use a malaria chemoprophylaxis in the first instance is to protect personnel.

In the WHO International Travel and Health Handbook it provides for a range of anti-malarials which includes mefloquine (Lariam). All of these anti-malaria drugs have contraindications and side effects. As I have stressed in previous replies to Parliamentary Questions on this issue, significant precautions are taken by the Defence Forces Medical Officers in assessing the medical suitability of members of our Defence Forces to take any of the anti-malarial medications. It is the policy of the Defence Forces that individuals are screened by a Medical Officer for fitness for service overseas and medical suitability.

There are three anti-malarial drugs in use in the Defence Forces, namely, Lariam (mefloquine), Malarone and Doxycycline. The choice of medication for overseas deployment, including the use of Lariam, is a medical decision made by medical officers in the Defence Forces, having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces.

A Working Group is currently examining issues arising in relation to the use of Lariam and has obtained advice from leading medical experts both national and international. I expect to receive the Group's Report shortly and I can assure the Deputy that I will carefully consider its recommendations.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

2105. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views regarding concerns raised by the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers that their members were severely disadvantaged as a result of being excluded from the national level parallel process and Defence Forces conciliation and arbitration process in January 2017. [37935/17]

2109. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the efforts made to deliver a transparent negotiation process through a clearly defined parallel structure and process for the Defence Forces representative associations during recent and future public service pay negotiations. [37939/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2105 and 2109 together.

Following the publication of the Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on 9 May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations.

Both RACO (Representative Association of Commissioned Officers) and PDFORRA (Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association) were invited to the negotiations which were held under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). I am advised that both RACO and PDFORRA had equal standing with members of ICTU throughout the talks' process. The issues raised by the Defence Forces Representative Associations were considered in tandem with those raised by other public sector representative associations and trade unions.

The Conciliation and Arbitration scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) provides a formal mechanism for the PDF Representative Associations, RACO and PD-FORRA, to engage with the Official side. The purpose of the scheme is to provide a means for the determination of claims and proposals from the Associations relating to remuneration and conditions of service. Officials from my Department continue to work with the Representative Associations in a positive and collaborative process within the C and A Scheme to resolve issues.

As I have previously stated, I plan to initiate a review of the Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force, with the review to commence before the end of 2017.

Defence Forces Pensions

2106. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to address the reduction of benefits to Defence Forces personnel since the introduction of the single pension scheme in January 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37936/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): As I indicated to the House in my reply to Question No. 51 on 11th July 2017, the occupational pension scheme terms of post-1 January 2013 new entrants to the public service, including the Permanent Defence Force, are governed by the Public Service Pensions (Single Scheme and Other Provisions) Act 2012. All first-time new entrants to pensionable public service employment on or after that date are members of the Single Scheme. Under the 2012 Act, overall statutory responsibility for the Single Scheme pension terms and rules rests with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Single Scheme was one of the key structural fiscal reform commitments agreed by Government with the EU/IMF in 2010 under the programme of financial support for Ireland. In the context of the Government's decision to introduce the Single Scheme, a stated primary objective is to help significantly reduce the cost of public service pensions in the longer-term through far-reaching transformation and reform of the public service pension system. It provides for a new approach which modernises and standardises pension arrangements throughout the public service. As stated by the then Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on publication of the relevant Bill in September 2011, the new scheme will be fairer particularly to those on low and moderate earnings and, above all, the public service will be better able to manage the costs associated with the demographic and other changes which are coming. These policy objectives and the underlying rationale for them were well publicised in advance of enactment of the 2012 Act.

As I also said in my reply to Question No. 51 on 11th July 2017, the Single Scheme must be viewed in the overall context of the fundamental changes and reforms to the pension scheme terms of post-1 January 2013 new entrants to the public service. Those reforms were decided by Government and the Oireachtas as necessary to support the long-term financial sustainability of the public service pension system. In that regard, I would refer the Deputy to the Annual Review of the FEMPI Acts published by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in June 2017, paragraph 34 of which states as follows:

“The 2017 estimate for the Exchequer pension bill is €2.59 billion in net terms. Underlying cost-increasing trends, notably improvements in life expectancy and connected demographic factors, will continue to challenge the financing of public service pensions. In particular, the expansion of the public service throughout the 1970s will lead to a large cohort of retirements in the current decade. In this context the launch at the start of 2013 of a new career-average

pension scheme for new-joiner public servants, known as the Single Public Service Pension Scheme, will be important in curbing upward cost pressures over the longer-term”.

The 2017 pension bill of €2.59 billion includes a net sum of €224.6 million in respect of Defence Forces pension benefits, the cost of which has been increasing year on year.

The terms and rules of the Single Scheme are fundamentally different to the superannuation arrangements of all public servants recruited before 1 January 2013. In that context, there are many established features of the pre-1 January 2013 public service occupational pension arrangements that have been discontinued, or that have been fundamentally changed under the Single Scheme. Among the most notable of these changes is the introduction of career-average pension accrual under the Single Scheme, in place of the more costly final salary pension accrual applicable in the earlier “pre-existing” public service pension schemes.

I should point out that notwithstanding the novel distinguishing features of the Single Scheme, members of the Permanent Defence Force in that Scheme retain the minimum pension age of 50 to reflect operational needs, as already applies to new entrant military personnel recruited since April 2004. This compares with an effective raising of the minimum pension age, from 65 to 68 years, in the case of the mainstream ‘standard accrual’ membership occupations in the Single Scheme. Moreover, the 2012 Act does not alter military retirement ages for future or serving military personnel generally, or upper service limits where applicable – these will continue to be determined by the Minister for Defence, following consultation with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. Importantly, the Single Scheme also retains ‘fast accrual’ pension terms for groups such as the Defence Forces: for operational and HR manpower policy reasons they are required to retire earlier than the norm, and on that account they retain early-paid pensions and accelerated pension accrual.

Defence Forces Pensions

2107. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the findings of a report by a company (details supplied) into the career pay and superannuation arrangements of Defence Forces officers relative to public servants. [37937/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in each part of the Irish public sector have traditionally been set by reference to levels of pay available in related public sector employments. On 18 October 2016, following Government approval, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, established the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) to advise Government on Public Service remuneration policy.

The report referred to by the Deputy was included in a submission made by the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (RACO) to the Public Service Pay Commission.

Following publication of the Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on 9 May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations.

The Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations attended the negotiations and the issues raised by the Associations were considered in tandem with those raised by other public sector representative associations and trade unions.

The Defence Forces have received the benefits of collective agreements in the past and it is intended that future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will continue to be dealt with

within this process.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

2108. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of the senior official from his Department who has been appointed to the working group established to review the State's industrial relations position to facilitate recent Government decisions on the Garda associations. [37938/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence has been afforded observer status by the Department of Justice and Equality, to the Working Group on industrial relations structures for an Garda Síochána. The official nominated to liaise with counterparts in the Department of Justice and Equality is Mr. Stephen Hall, Principal Officer, Conciliation and Arbitration Branch.

Question No. 2109 answered with Question No. 2105.

Defence Forces Representative Organisations

2110. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reasons during the public sector pay talks when RACO tabled retention initiatives and invited defence sector management to do likewise the matter was diverted to the negotiating table of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37940/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following the publication of the Report of the Public Service Pay Commission on 9 May 2017, the Government initiated negotiations on an extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement ahead of Budget 2018 considerations. The Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations attended the negotiations which were held under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). The Official side at the talks included representatives from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with officials from the Department of Defence and military management. The issues raised by the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations were considered in tandem with those raised by other public sector representative associations and trade unions.

I subsequently met the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations following the finalisation of the Workplace Climate in the Defence Forces focus group research and before its official publication. There will be further engagement between the Department of Defence, the Defence Forces and the Representative Associations on this matter.

It should be noted that the Department of Defence, in conjunction with the Defence Forces, raised recruitment and retention issues, as part of the submission to the Public Service Pay Commission. This is specifically referenced by the Commission in paragraph 6.13 of the Report.

Section 3 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 provides that the Public Service Pay Commission be requested to complete a comprehensive examination of underlying difficulties in recruitment and retention in those sectors and employment streams identified in the Report of the Public Sector Pay Commission. The parties to the Agreement will have the opportunity to make submissions to the Commission.

Defence Forces Deployment

2111. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the deployment of the Defence Forces to aid flood relief efforts in County Donegal was delayed by up to six hours due to a dispute between his Department and the local authority over the issuing public indemnity insurance. [37941/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Following the recent flooding in Donegal the Defence Forces were deployed to provide Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) assistance to Donegal County Council on foot of a request from the Council.

I can confirm that the issue of insurance cover for the Defence Forces did not arise in relation to this deployment. The Defence Forces are indemnified by the State Claims Agency when deployed in their role of ATCA.

Brexit Staff

2112. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37989/17]

2113. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of staff deployed full time in his Department in respect of Brexit; if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38005/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2112 and 2113 together.

The outcome of the vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK will have implications across all aspects of the business of the European Union. While the vote does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement within the EU in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is expected that Brexit will have an impact on future developments in the Defence sphere. The structures put in place in the Department of Defence to address the potential challenges arising from Brexit include the assignment of responsibility to a senior official at Assistant Secretary General level in relation to Brexit related matters. The senior official is leading the Department's input to deliberations within the framework established across Government and is supported in their role by a number of Branches in the Department. The senior official represents the Department on the Inter-Departmental Group on EU-UK Affairs which is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and is engaged with the identification of key strategic, operational and policy issues arising from Brexit. In addition, the Management Board is acting as a clearing house for Brexit and maintains oversight on an ongoing basis. As the Deputy will also be aware, the Government has adopted a contingency framework to deal with all issues arising in respect of the UK vote to leave the EU. Accordingly, any issues arising, including those within the Defence area, whether bilateral, or in respect of developments in CSDP, or regarding our wider international multilateral defence engagements, will be also addressed within that framework. As matters relating to Brexit are currently being absorbed and dealt with within existing Department structures and resources, there is currently no dedicated Brexit funding allocation in the Department of Defence. As the Deputy is aware the formal EU-UK negotiations commenced in July and a series of meetings have already taken place. All potential consequences in the defence sphere, arising during these negotiations, will remain the subject of ongoing consideration by my Department

throughout this process.

Departmental Projects

2114. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the level of construction inflation that has been experienced by his Department in the 18 months to September 2017 in respect of construction projects; the way in which he monitors construction inflation and the mechanisms his Department employs to establish this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38021/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): For Department of Defence capital projects, construction inflation, including projections of future inflation levels, is monitored taking account of both the Tender Price Index published twice yearly by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) and the reports published annually by some of the larger Quantity Surveying and Cost Management firms.

The published documentation provides a picture of typical construction inflation levels.

The nature of the Defence property portfolio predisposes towards a high proportion of refurbishment work and work on heritage type buildings as well as projects in relation to specialist military structures that are not typical construction projects, such as military firing ranges, ordnance storage facilities etc. The portfolio of projects is also quite dispersed by location.

Experience of average construction inflation for Department of Defence construction projects over the 18 months to September 2017 is generally in line with the SCSI Tender Price Index, albeit that there can be variation in respect of individual projects for the reasons outlined above.

Public Services Card

2115. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he or bodies and agencies under the remit of his Department plans to make services or payments dependent on the mandatory use and production of the public services card; if so, the services and payments which will now be dependant on the mandatory use of the public services card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38145/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): My Department has no plans to make the use of the public services card mandatory for accessing services provided.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

2116. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the annual percentage of non-commercial State-sponsored bodies staff under the remit of his Department who were women in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38360/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The only state board under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board. An Executive Officer from the Department of Defence acts as Secretary to the Board which does not have a

specific staffing compliment.

Departmental Staff Data

2117. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the annual percentage of public service staff that were women under the remit of his department in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38383/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The following table provides details of the percentage of the staff of my Department, civil servants and civilian employees, and members of the Permanent Defence Force, who were female in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Department of Defence (civil servants)	66.5%	66%	66.5%	67.6%	66.6%	65.9%	64.7%	64.3%
Department of Defence (civilian employees)	16.37%	17.66%	18.30%	17.74%	18.53%	19.04%	19.51%	20.25%
Permanent Defence Force	5.96%	6.03%	6.31%	6.16%	6.07%	6.04%	6.22%	6.36%

Research Funding

2118. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the decision by University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology to withdraw staffing and funding from the Irish Marine and Energy Research Cluster, IMERC, in Ringaskiddy, County Cork, (details supplied); and the future of the research facility, in view of this withdrawal by same. [38529/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am aware of the steps taken by University College Cork (UCC) and Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) in relation to IMERC, following the Review of IMERC undertaken in 2016. I understand that, as part of the Review of IMERC, key personnel in the Naval Service were interviewed. In addition, there was informal phone contact with officials in my Department. Neither my Department nor

the Naval Service was consulted on the decision to withdraw staffing and funding from IMERC.

I note that UCC and CIT are continuing to explore options to take forward roles previously undertaken by IMERC. In that regard I understand that UCC and CIT are proposing to refine and enhance the original Memorandum of Agreement on IMERC to support collaboration in teaching and research. They are also engaging with the Local Authority in relation to exploiting inward investment and development activities with the continuing support of UCC, CIT and the Naval Service. I look forward to the outcome of these discussions.

The Naval Service enjoyed a very good working relationship with UCC and CIT as part of IMERC and continues to do so. The Naval Service collaborates closely with both institutions in research projects through their constituent research centres and particular academic Departments. In addition the Naval Service continues as an academic partner with CIT at the National Maritime College of Ireland.

Brexit Issues

2119. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the development of sectorial response plans to Brexit, the publication date of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38691/17]

2120. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including opportunities and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38707/17]

2121. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of issues identified for consideration in the context of Brexit including threats and their prioritisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38723/17]

2122. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the scenario planning that has been conducted by his Department for Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38739/17]

2123. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the methodology employed in the prioritisation of responses to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38755/17]

2124. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the funds that have been requested in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38771/17]

2125. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the funds have been allocated in response to threats resulting from Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38803/17]

2126. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit related roles; the expected date for these rolls to be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38819/17]

2127. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his Department's priorities for risk mitigation in response to Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38835/17]

2128. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the

membership and role of all Brexit related stakeholder engagement groups working with his Department on Brexit issues; the number of times each stakeholder group has met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38851/17]

2129. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the Brexit related research currently being undertaken by his Department; the topics under consideration; the date this research commenced; the expected date for completion and publication in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38883/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 2119 to 2129, inclusive, together.

The comprehensive document “Ireland and the negotiations on the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union: The Government’s Approach” published on 2 May outlined in detail the structures put in place by the Government to ensure a strategic and whole-of Government response to Brexit that ensures a coordinated approach to the identification of key priority issues for the EU-UK negotiations and the wider domestic response.

Since the publication of the comprehensive document, the Government has sought to further increase its strategic oversight of Brexit through the addition of a dedicated responsibility for Brexit matters to the role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade. The Cabinet Committee structures have also been reformed and a new Cabinet Committee has been established to deal with EU Affairs including Brexit.

The Government’s National Risk Assessment 2017, which provides a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country, was published on 29 August following a public consultation process. The National Risk Assessment acknowledges the significance of risk arising from Brexit, and that Brexit represents an overarching theme that could have far-reaching impacts on nearly all aspects of national life. It identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy.

As set out in comprehensive document of 2 May, the Government’s continuing work to ensure that Ireland’s interests are reflected in the EU’s approach to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations is a central dimension of Ireland’s strategic response to Brexit.

Work is also continuing across Government on Ireland’s wider response to the challenges and opportunities posed by Brexit, building on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders and encompassing the following themes:

- sustainable fiscal policies to ensure capacity to absorb and respond to economic shocks, not least from Brexit;
- policies to make Irish enterprise more diverse and resilient, to diversify trade and investment patterns, and to strengthen competitiveness;
- prioritising policy measures and dedicating resources to protect jobs and businesses in the sectors and regions most affected by Brexit;
- realising economic opportunities arising from Brexit, and helping businesses adjust to any new logistical or trade barriers arising;
- making a strong case at EU level that Ireland will require support that recognises where Brexit represents a serious disturbance to the Irish economy.

Policy decisions in support of these objectives also arise across a wide range of areas, in-

cluding the annual budgetary process; the forthcoming National Planning Framework 2040; the new 10-year National Capital Plan; the Review of Enterprise 2025 Policy, and sectorial policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

The outcome of the vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK will have implications across all aspects of the business of the European Union. While the vote does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement within the EU in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is expected that Brexit will have an impact on future developments in the Defence sphere. The structures put in place in the Department of Defence to address the potential challenges arising from Brexit include the assignment of responsibility to a senior official at Assistant Secretary General level in relation to Brexit related matters. The senior official is leading the Department's input to deliberations within the framework established across Government and is supported in their role by a number of Branches in the Department. The senior official represents the Department on the InterDepartmental Group on EU-UK Affairs which is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and is engaged with the identification of key strategic, operational and policy issues arising from Brexit. In addition, the Management Board is acting as a clearing house for Brexit and maintains oversight on an ongoing basis.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the Government has adopted a contingency framework to deal with all issues arising in respect of the UK vote to leave the EU. Accordingly, any issues arising, including those within the Defence area, whether bilateral, or in respect of developments in CSDP, or regarding our wider international multilateral defence engagements, will be also addressed within that framework.

As the Deputy has previously been advised, on 19th January, 2015 Ireland signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department of Defence, Ireland and the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence on enhancement on certain aspects of Security and Defence Cooperation. This provides a framework for developing and furthering bilateral co-operation and relations between the Department of Defence and the UK Ministry of Defence. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding placed already existing cooperation arrangements in the Defence area between Ireland and the UK on a more formal and transparent footing, while fully respecting the differing policy positions and security arrangements of both States.

The MoU takes into account matters such as military forces training; exercises and military education; exchange of views on EU Common Security and Defence Policy; potential for joint contributions to UN Crisis Management Operations; joint procurement initiatives; pooling and sharing resources; general sharing on reform in defence services; potential for staff exchanges; joint contribution to Security Sector Reform and capacity building in crisis locations and the sharing of information. Having regard to the bi-lateral arrangements already in place, and the fact Brexit does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is not considered that a specific sectorial response plan in the Defence sphere is necessary at this time. Such a requirement will be kept under constant review and all potential consequences in the defence sphere, arising during these negotiations which commenced in July, will remain the subject of ongoing consideration by my Department throughout this process.

Formal and informal meetings of Ministers at EU level provide a significant opportunity to engage bilaterally with Ministers from other member States on issues of concern to Ireland, both within the scope of the Ministerial but also more broadly. When attending Council meetings, most recently in Tallinn, Estonia, where last week I attended the Informal Defence Ministers meeting. I avail of the opportunity to engage in informal bilateral discussions with my EU

counterparts en-marge of the meetings which is an important aspect of Ministerial attendance and have raised the issue of Brexit and Ireland's key considerations as and when the opportunity arises. In terms of formal bilateral meetings, I have also met with Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon, MP Secretary of State at the UK Ministry of Defence. Our discussion covered a wide range of topics mainly in the security and defence domain but also focussed on Brexit and the implications for Ireland and the EU. Formal talks with the UK between officials are scheduled to take place next Thursday, 14 September here in Dublin, in the context of regular ongoing engagement under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on enhancement on certain aspects of Security and Defence Cooperation.

It is the case, given the unique nature of Defence that no defence specific stakeholder group has been established, nor has there been any requirement at this juncture for me to meet with the Brexit negotiation task force. Other than normal internal policy considerations, there is no specific Brexit related research currently being undertaken. These issues and any potential future such requirements will be kept under constant review as the negotiation process unfolds.

Regarding resources, matters relating to Brexit are currently being absorbed and dealt with within existing Department structures and resources and accordingly there is currently no dedicated Brexit funding allocation in the Department of Defence, nor are there any additional Brexit related roles envisaged at this time.

The Government remains under no illusions about the complexity of these negotiations. In that regard, I wish to reassure the Deputy that my Department is monitoring the ongoing situation to ensure that the Department and the Defence Forces are well prepared to address any potential issues or potential future threats arising in the defence area on foot of Brexit.

Departmental Budgets

2130. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the expenditure savings that are earmarked for his Department for 2018 that are not accounted for in the mid-year expenditure report or are not included in the fiscal space calculations for 2018. [38899/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The budget allocation for Defence provides mainly for the pay and allowances of the Defence Forces, civil servants and civilian employees in the Defence Sector, ongoing standing and operational costs of the Defence Forces and investment in essential equipment and infrastructure. It also provides for the payment of pension entitlements to former members of the Defence Forces as well as funding for Civil Defence and a grant towards the running costs of the Irish Red Cross. This allocation allows the Defence Forces to deliver on all their assigned roles, both at home and overseas, and facilitates investment in essential equipment and infrastructure, as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

Defence expenditure programmes are on-going in nature and no reduction in these programmes is envisaged for 2018. Therefore, no expenditure savings are forecast for my Department in 2018. It should be noted that the final expenditure allocation for 2018 will not be settled until the budgetary process is concluded later in the year.